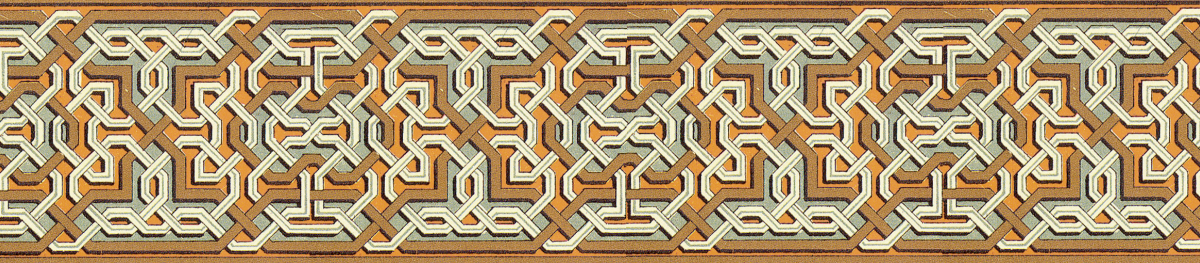


Aziz Al-Azmeh

The Times of History:
Universal Topics in



I s l a m i c
Historiography

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The Times of History

Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography

by

Aziz Al-Azmeh



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword: Beyond Orientalism, by Hayden White	ix
Preface	xv
 I. Historical Categorization	
1. Tropes and Temporalities of Historiographic Romanticism, Modern and Islamic	3
2. Islam and the History of Civilizations	39
 II. Typological Time, Patterning and the Past Appropriated	
3. Chronophagous Discourse: A Study of the Clerico-Legal Appropriation of the World in an Islamic Tradition	67
4. The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism	101
 III. History of the Future	
5. God's Chronography and Dissipative Time	139
6. Rhetoric for the Senses: A Consideration of Muslim Paradise Narratives	165
 IV. Distractions of Clio: Impasses and Perspectives of Historians' History	
7. Islamic Political Thought: Current Historiography and the Frame of History	185
8. Monotheistic Monarchy	267
 Acknowledgements	291
Index of Subjects	293
Index of Proper Names	307

“wir wollen weniger erhoben
und fleissiger gelesen sein”

G. E. Lessing

FOREWORD

Hayden White: Beyond Orientalism

I am pleased to be asked to present Professor Aziz Al-Azmeh's collection of essays on the historiography of the Near East, Muslim religiosity, and the problems raised by the effort to specify the nature of "Islam." I found them illuminating, full of learning, and intimately relevant to the understanding of current conflicts throughout the Arab world. I hasten to add that I am anything but an expert in these matters, but I recognize expertise when I see it. Al-Azmeh is a subtle guide for anyone wishing to pierce through the fog of prejudice, false learning, and ideology about both the contemporary and the historical Near East.

But this collection of essays is about much more than these currently pressing matters. It is also a sustained, brilliantly argued, and intimidatingly learned exposition of the relevance of modern critical historiography to the current (mis)understanding of the *modern* Middle East. Professor Al-Azmeh shows that contemporary politics in the Middle East as well as Western misunderstanding of these politics are a consequence—among other things—not just of a lack of historical knowledge but also of a failure to comprehend what a properly historical knowledge consists of. So, these texts make an important contribution to contemporary understanding of the politics, social structures, religious ideas, and sectarian struggles of the modern Middle East. But they also make an important contribution to the understanding of modern Western ideas about historical reality, scientific historical research, and the ways in which certain modern ideas about history underlie and sustain the conflicts they wish to illuminate.

In fact, and here I presume to speak as an expert, Al-Azmeh's collection of essays constitutes a unique contribution to contemporary historiography and philosophy of history. It engages directly in the principal historiographic debates of the past twenty years. Moreover, it does so not in an abstract and only theoretical way, but also practically, by

applying its critical principles to a specific body of writing on, in, and about the various societies, religions, and cultures that comprise the world of Arabic culture and that congeries of religious ideas referred to as “Islam.”

A principal target of Al-Azmeh’s critical reflection is culturalism, product of a tendency especially in ideologically motivated political discourse to gather up everything of a given historical configuration (he calls it a “mass” of historical phenomena) into a comprehensive totality conceived as manifesting an identifiable “essence” or substance—something like the Hegelian “Geist”—which at once determines the history of this mass and explains everything about it in terms of cycles of fulfilment and/or degeneration caused by “corruption” from within or “pollution” from without. Thus, both popular and scientific research into the history of the Middle East can speak of an “Arab world” in which all of the various social, political, economic, and cultural differences that appear therein are melded into a single ideologically defined entity. Or we hear of an “Islam” or a “Muslim civilization” produced by a particular “sectarian” version of this complex of religious traditions, stretching from North Africa across India to Indonesia and beyond, and creating a stereotype which can justify any number of hostile (xenophobic) and/or sympathetic (xenophilic) responses to any of its manifestations anywhere. Al-Azmeh insists that this historical “mass” should not be gathered under a single name (“Islam”) and treated as a cultural *unum*. He holds that a properly “historical” approach to this complex entity can liberate both Westerners and Middle Easterners of the myths that have been fostered by Muslim thinkers themselves and swallowed whole by Western scholars. No simple “historist” pietism will be adequate to this task. It requires a genuinely modern and rigorously scientific historiography to accomplish it.

In this respect, Al-Azmeh’s book may be seen as a major contribution to the project popularized by the late Edward Said, which was nothing less than an effort to explode the myth of “Orientalism.” But Al-Azmeh’s work is much more than a continuation or extension of Said’s project. And this because: Said, for all his learning, insight and passion, did not have the scholarly gear to dismantle this Orientalism which he had correctly identified as the product of an effort to provide ideological justification for the West’s “molestation” of a quarter of the world’s population. Said’s was a literary sensibility. He did not know the *history* of the portion of the globe whose cause he tirelessly publicized in the Western media. Said was outraged at the Western misrepresentation of the Arab world, and he acutely criticized the scholarly,

literary, and institutional apparatuses (such as the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago) that contributed to the creation of the myth of “the Orient.” But Said was not a historian or rather, his idea of what a proper historical take on the Orient should be shared too many of the attitudes informing that “Orientalism” which he wished to criticize.

Al-Azmeh proposes a modern (or perhaps it might be called a “modernist”) scientific historical method which differs utterly from the sentimental and empathic historicism of the Romantic age. This historicism, he argues, was informed by idealist ideas of the purity of origins, organicist notions of holism, the moralizing topoi of “rise and fall” or “purity and decadence,” notions of essence and/or substance—ideas which, ironically, have their own counterparts in recent and contemporary “primitivist” movements in the Middle East. In their identification of modernism with corruption, their insistence on a return to the origins, their hostility to progressive political and economic reforms, their disdain for (Western) “rationalism,” these movements fuel sectarian rebellions in the name of an “Islam” which never existed except in the minds of a few visionaries—and those Western scholars who, in their desire to remain true to the “sources,” ended up confirming it as a fact of “history.” The contemporary popularity of the “conflict of civilizations” thesis of Professor Samuel Huntington is the unfortunate product of such thinking.

Thus, the irony of modern orientalist discourse, according to Al-Azmeh, is that it is a creation as much of certain Arab and Muslim thinkers as it is of Western ideologues interested in serving the cause of Western imperialism. It appears, in Al-Azmeh’s account, that many Arab and Muslim divines, scholars, politicians, historians, and anthropologists have had an interest in creating an “Islam” that is as mythical as anything conjured up by Western ideologues. Thus, Western orientalists, in their efforts to reproduce the account of the rise of Islam and the rapid expansion of Muslim religion swallowed whole certain myths regarding the originary nature of Islam, its seemingly monolithic doctrinal basis, the idea of Islam as a progressive decline from its “primitive” purity, the notion that Muslim politics had been and could only be theocratic, and above all the belief that there had been no such thing as a politics or concept of a state apart from Muslim theology prior to modern times. The betrayal by certain opportunist political leaders (and their Western imperialist sponsors) of the effort of the nations of the Middle East to modernize themselves opened the door to the kinds of conflicts with which we are today burdened.

Al-Azmeh's own approach to the study of the Middle East is based on a distinction between conventional historiographical notions deriving from the nineteenth century (and still dominant in Western academic historical inquiry) and the kind of structuralist historical methods represented by the *Annales* group in France in the post-World War II period. He knows that historical representations are constructions derived from the study of fragmentary and incomplete evidence, but he distinguishes between fictional constructions of the past and scientific constructions. He is suspicious of narrativized representations of long-term historical phenomena, because he knows that narratives play to a human, all-too-human desire for organic wholeness, coherence, and closure to which human affairs can never attain. He is quite content to deal with the different aspects of human life in society in their conflict, incoherence, and inconsequentiality as manifested at a specific site or geographical locale and stress the differences and dislocations of things human. Thus, he challenges the Western myths of continuity that inform beliefs about Graeco-Roman "civilization" or "Judaean-Christian" tradition. He suggests, for example, that there may be more continuity between Judaic and Muslim traditions than there is between Judaism and Christianity. He indicts the idea that "Islam" sprang full-blown from the head of Mohamet, burst from the Arabian peninsula already fully formed, lived out a drama of endogeneity and autonomy utterly removed from the cultural traditions and institutions of the Persian-Byzantine-Roman world which it supposedly displaced. Al-Azmeh views Muslim culture as a complex product of "Late Antiquity," the institutions of which—and especially the political institutions thereof—owe as much if not more to that heritage than to the mythical "nomadic" origins of Mohamet and his followers (townsmen all, as Al-Azmeh points out). These ideas about Islam are not constructions in the sense of inventions out of whole cloth but constructions deriving from sound social theoretical hypotheses in the light of which the "sources" have to be interrogated and made to yield up the kinds of truths that modern social science reveals about modern societies. The whole enterprise of what might be called (without prejudice) "deconstruction-reconstruction" is a thrilling and exhilarating insight into the ways in which historians and others, both Western and indigenous, have built an image of a culture that could never have existed as the exotic thing that it has been presented as being. Professor Al-Azmeh has stepped on a lot of toes and punctured a lot of windbags, Western and Eastern alike. And he has done so with an elegance of expression, a wit, and an erudition seldom seen in academic writing.

In sum, Professor Al-Azmeh presents us with a set of rigorously conceptualized and graciously elaborated themes, a central sustained argument, and a range of information, on everything from late Mediterranean antiquity, medieval history, Muslim and Christian theology, sacred kingship, ecclesiology, typology, and theodicy to postmodernism, philosophy of history, semiotics, theories of textuality, structuralism, rhetorics, notions of figurative representation, and philological method. All of this makes of all, Professor Al-Azmeh's book a kind of propaedeutic for any future study of "Islam." In the process, he pillories all the brands of postmodernism that might invoke the myth of "Islam" to promote that other myth, which sees contemporary global conflict as a "clash of civilizations" and a Manichaean struggle to the death between "religions" driven by a desire to remain true to "origins" which never existed at all.

Preface

The main concerns addressed in this book relate ultimately to questions regarding the constitution of historical categories in general, and of objects of historical inquiry more specifically, in relation to the times of history: the relationship of the present to the past, senses of temporality, aspects of periodization and the notions of continuity and origin, historiographic practices and the patterning of historical narratives, and various types of temporality such as the serial and the typological. These are all issues which arise implicitly or explicitly in historical writing overall, and in modern reflections upon historiography and historical writing. The bulk of the thematic material treated is medieval and Islamic, but I have also taken up aspects of modern conceptions of history and historical writing, European as well as Arabic, with some exploration of comparativism and of comparativist possibilities.

Correlatively, the studies here collected aim to naturalize, to de-exoticize historical materials—narratives, concepts, times, categories—that have a bearing on Islamic history, Islam being understood as an historiographic classificatory category, a denomination standing for a heavily patterned historical itinerary. This calls up for the exploration of precisely what might be involved, historically, conceptually and narratively, in proposing “Islam” as a category of the historical understanding whose story history writes, and as a category of historical explanation, which adjudges criteria of historical relevance and irrelevance, as well as possibilities of comparison and claims to exceptionalism. This patterning of Islamic history is in the essays here collected considered both with reference to modern scholarship (chs. 1, 2 and 7), and with reference to medieval Islamic conceptions (chs. 1, 3, 4, and 5). Thus I treat notions of an Islamic civilization, the history of the Muslim canon and the time of canon, time in Islamic eschatology (and in others), and Arabic historiography medieval and modern. I propose (in ch. 3) ele-

ments of a general theory of Tradition in the context of legal discourse, and offer (in ch. 8) elements of the history of one particular theme, that of conceptions of monotheistic kingship across the expanse of Late Antiquity and the history of the Caliphate, in a manner that attempts to overcome a number of obstacles to perception and conception arising from unreflected notions of Orient and Occident. This last theme is preceded by a treatment of issues arising from the history of Islamic political thought.

Closely related to the question of historical categorization is that of periodization. This theme is closely related to that of uses of the past, the patterning of temporal relations, conceptions of continuity (which ought not be confused with identity) and discontinuity, and above all the notion of Tradition in general. These are crucial to such an investigation, and are studied throughout this book from a variety of thematic and conceptual perspectives (chs. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8).

Finally, and perhaps inevitably given the state of scholarship and the broader state of things in general today, the theme of Orientalism is brought into relief with specific reference to the theme of Islamic political thought, in terms of some of the themes discussed in the rest of the book (ch. 7—but also ch. 2). This particular discussion is largely historiographic in the broad sense, and seeks to draw together a number of transversal themes as they intersect in one particular topic of historical writing, most specifically those related to the assumption, and the consequences of the assumption, that the distinctive feature of a history called Islamic is a form of supra-historical causality identified with the Muslim religion in its scripturalist form, imposing certain topics of research while correlatively relegating others to irrelevance, and certain conceptions of periodization. This historiographic discussion, which draws in quite a number of themes and certain questions of historical method, is complemented by an historical sketch of elements of the same topic, very differently defined, conceptualized and configured (ch. 8). What I might have nuanced in this regard would have been the tonality of some blanket statements on Orientalism, especially in the earlier essays, not least in light of the unsalutary excesses of anti-Orientalism both in the Arab world and in western universities, and of developments within this academic field itself.

Yet ultimately, these essays are textured and focused conceptually, and often thematically, outside the confines of the debate over Orientalism on which much energy was expended since 1978, and matters Islamic are often approached here in a manner unfamiliar to the grain

of orientalist scholarship. These essays are located, in Hayden White's expression, "beyond Orientalism." I am not necessarily suggesting that the debate over Orientalism since 1978 has entirely served its purpose. Clearly, since 2001, matters of perception and confrontation have, if anything, become far more acute than hitherto. What I am suggesting is that the public purposes of this debate now require a different mode of engagement; grids of perception and misrecognition of Islam that had once been confined to the *Stammtisch* or the preserve of some hostile academics are becoming something of a common universal *doxa*, and indeed components of social forces.

As to the cognitive purpose which is the primary concern of this book, the polemical impetus of the Orientalism debate having peaked, and now sustained by increasing abandonment to a riotous rococo impulsion, this seems paradoxically to have been served largely, and this debate has left a definite perspectival sediment in the academic study of matters Arabic and Islamic. What remains is the re-conception of the frames of the history called Islamic (most deliberately here, in chs. 2, 7 and 8), its re-configuration within the bounds of historical reason, beyond classical Orientalism, and beyond the imperatives of polemic. This is the way I see forward in any attempt to treat this history with the normal desiderata of the historical sciences, and to allow it to have its place in terms of the universal themes of history and historical research. The times of the histories of Islam are, after all, times of history overall. Hence the sub-title of this book: Universal topics in Islamic Historiography.

Colleagues, friends and other readers of the essays printed in this book have over recent years urged me to collect them and make them available in a form more accessible than that of journal articles and chapters in edited works (all but the seventh chapter of this book have been published before). On consideration, I have become convinced that there is merit to the suggestion that the essays here collected do constitute a coherent book, as they deal with a number of transversal topical and conceptual concerns relevant to historiography and historical consciousness in general, and to the massive and rapidly amplifying scholarly literature on the vastly oversimplified histories of "Islam" in particular. I was particularly encouraged by Hayden White, who has generously written a Foreword to this book.

The essays here reprinted were published during the decade 1994–2005. I might well have written some of them differently today, and in some cases enhanced their empirical base in light of subsequent research. But I am not likely to have changed matters of substance, and have therefore decided to have them printed as they stand in order to preserve their integrity, some inevitable repetition and mutual quotation notwithstanding, with minor revisions. What has been simplified throughout is transliteration from Arabic, retaining only the macrons but removing dots and other signs; the result should be readily accessible to the Arabist, but shall not vex the non-Arabist. A translation of the titles of Arabic works quoted has been provided throughout, as this book hopes to contribute to integrating Arabic and Islamic materials in the mainstream of historical studies, and is not intended only for Arabists or specialists in Islamic Studies.

Aziz Al-Azmeh
February 2007

CHAPTER 1

Tropes and Temporalities of Historiographic Romanticism, Modern and Islamic

“Hegel bemerkt irgendwo, dass alle grossen weltgeschichtlichen Tatsachen und Personen sich sozusagen zweimal ereignen. Er hat vergessen hinzuzufügen: das eine Mal als Tragödie, das andere Mal als Farce ... Die Tradition aller Toten Geschlechter lastet wie ein Alp auf dem Gehirne der Lebenden. Und wenn sie eben damit beschäftigt scheinen, sich und die Dinge umzuwälzen, noch nicht Dagewesenes zu schaffen, gerade in solchen Epochen ... beschwören sie ängstlich die Geister der Vergangenheit zu ihrem Dienste herauf, entlehnen ihnen namen, Schlachtparole, Kostüm ... Die Totenerweckung ... diene also dazu, die neuen Kämpfe zu verherrlichen, nicht die alten zu parodieren, die gegebene Aufgabe in der Phantasie zu übertreiben, nicht von ihrer Lösung in der Wirklichkeit zurückzuflüchten.”

Karl Marx

Below are two texts which will put forth the substance of what is to follow far more eloquently and completely than I could ever hope to do:

It is not that there is any difference in God's knowledge according as it is produced by things not yet in existence, by things now or by things that are no more. Unlike us, He does not look ahead to the future, see the present before him, and look back to the past ... Hence all events in time, events that will be and are not yet and those that are now, being present, and those that have passed and are no more, all of them are apprehended by him in a motionless and everlasting present moment ... Nor does it make any difference whether He looks at them from present, past or future, since his knowledge, unlike ours, of the three kinds of time, present, past and future, does not change as time changes ... Neither does [God's] attention stray from one subject to another ... for he knows events in time without any temporal acts of knowing of his own.¹

I should like to propose that this paradigm of temporality be transposed from the mind of God to those of a variety of others who are today engaged in the production historical discourse: that of the conservative nationalist historian, that of the civilizational analyst who speaks somberly and with utmost earnestness of Orient and Occident, of Islam and the West, and of their immemorial conflicts and *Erbfeindschaften*, and not least of the spirit of the lyricist of prelapsarian cultures and communities, better known today as the unreflectively post-modernist, the theorist of multiculturalism, the apostle of what is implausibly described as post-colonial discourse. To all of them, time—the time of nations, civilizations, and idyllic communities—is immeasurable, a-chronic, qualitative, the time whose moments are not so much the cumulative and mutable moments of the chronometer, but a chronography of fulfilment and decline, of revival and abeyance.

A mind that perceives time in this way is clearly one of a decidedly mythical turn. Let me illustrate this by turning to the second of the texts proposed:

absolutely prehistoric time ... [is] time which is indivisible by nature and absolutely identical, which therefore, whatever duration may be imputed to it, can only be regarded as a moment, i.e. as time in which the end is like the beginning and the beginning like the end, a kind of eternity, because it is itself not a sequence of time but only One Time, which is not in itself an objective time, i.e. a sequence of times, but only becomes time (that is, the past) relative to the time which follows it.²

Schelling clearly describes the contrast between the achronic time of myth and the chronic time of history. One might say that therein lies one component in the fundamental contrast between two types of the historical understanding: the contrast between, broadly speaking, those who speak for the possibility of a scientific history, and those who insist on dissolving historical discourse into the undeniable rhetorical tropes it contains, ideological motifs upon which it builds, and the political functions it performs.

In this context, narrativist and tropological analysis of historical discourses appears to the practising historian not as an end in itself, nor a procedure that calls for rejection, but rather as a fruitful technique of historical analysis, including source-criticism, in which the linguistic turn is tempered in such a way that it does not become an uncontrollable linguistic drift or a flippant exercise in political posturing. And while there can be no denying that historical writing must be

approached as a constructivist act rather than a simple graphic transcription of facts ostensibly pre-given, this does not betoken to me a nihilistic epistemology. The scientific practice of history, like that of science overall, is not a magical exercise that betokens full control, and the notion of science generally under attack by the linguistic and tropological turn is better labelled as scientism than a reflection of scientific practice. Constructivism in historical scholarship allows for the proper constitution of objects of study—population movements, economic cycles, social relations, ideologies, mentalities, and so forth. The exposition of historical topics deliberately constituted might be and is indeed often narrative, and therefore subject to the structures of all narrative. But scientific historical writing also needs to go beyond story-telling, and involve analytical procedures derived from a variety of social science disciplines. Of the objects of historical study are the sub-categories of an historical mass: a nation, a community, a civilization. A certain, pervasive, vitalism and organismic notion of historical mass implies notions of time and temporality which reclaim, implicitly or explicitly, duration at the expense of chronometry, and it is this which will be investigated in the first section of this essay, before the discussion is widened to certain tropes of Arabic and Muslim historical writing.

Neo-romantic temporality

Herder, and after him other Romantics, principally Hamann, von Humboldt, and Burckhardt, were largely responsible for the introduction of Platonic ideas of *Geist*, *Idee*, *Prinzip*, and *Wesenslehre* into historical discourse; historical discourse prior to them having been largely immune to Platonism.³ Kant in his reviews of Herder was the first to note the contrast signaled by Schelling, when he wrote of the Königsberg/Riga Pietist's almost pantheistic predilection for analogies, and concluded that the poetic spirit which enlivened his expression did violence to his philosophy, by substituting synonyms for explanations, and allegories for truths.⁴

It is this contrast—between chronic time and pure duration—and its consequences for the constitution of historical categories, that I should like to highlight, as I describe the historical poetics of irrationalist historicism that comprehends alike doctrines of history associated with right-wing nationalism and racism, and the post-colonial doctrine of history—the filiation is very real, and the conceptual morphologies palpably congruent, but the connection is usually passed over in silence by the *cognoscenti*, and is blissfully absent from the awareness of the

majority of those who profess enthusiastically postmodernist tastes in a state of prelapsarian, Adamic innocence.

Not for the first time since the spread of modernity following the French Revolution and the political forms and concepts, the ideologies, and the legal norms it spawned, there has been a quest for organicism, for notions of intra-uterine immediacy, thought to go beyond the arid snares and illusions of Reason, of Jacobinism, of Bonapartism, of developmentalist historicism. At the time of the French Revolution and in reaction to it, after the revolutionary waves of the 1830s, after 1870, and of 1918–20, no less than after the demise of Communism (and this last moment is crucial for the consolidation of postmodernism), certain voices have multiplied and achieved demotic hegemony: voices seeking to privilege sentiment over structure, organic continuity in history over change and progress, communitarian particularity over universalism, historicism over evolutionist historicism, the value of the vital over that of coldly rational, Meister Eckhart over Magister Cartesius. In all cases, this preference for the primal, foetal, and prelapsarian over the evolved, cultivated, and corrupted has been allied to reclamation irrational in history and in society.

In the nineteenth century particularly, this broad trend was officiated politically as well as discursively, most particularly in Germany, under the title of *Kultur*,⁵ counterposed to universalising French reclamations of *civilization* (the contrast has an interesting polemical history, including stimulating Slavophil writings against the West, and is most engagingly brought out in Thomas Mann's polemic against his brother Heinrich in 1918, in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*). The term "culture" has since become the standard retort to claims that history is universally human, one which involves changes in the cultures of human collectivities as meaningfully as it transforms the conditions of their material life. In this anti-Enlightenment discourse, culture itself becomes a nature, endowed with warm fastness, with reliability, with predictability, and it becomes possible to construe the history of human collectivities—of historical masses under the aspect of history—as a natural history, inherently resistant to claims and movements deriving from the Enlightenment.

At the close of the twentieth century, a similar quest for an irrationalist foundationalism is being officiated under the title of a self-proclaimed anti-foundationalist post-colonialism which, in a curious concord between xenophiles and xenophobes, construes an historical mass—a nation, a civilization, or a community of blood, of race, of religion, or of sexual preference—as the repository of abiding cultural

patterns, and construes the consequent relations between historical masses as over-determined by “culture,” to be managed at best by dialogue, at worst by conflict in a natural history essentially, but not, for *bien pensant* multiculturalists at least, irremediably and unremittingly social-Darwinist.

The corollary of this is that different historical masses need to be apprehended in terms of their own modes of self-reference, and the natural correlate of this wholly illegitimate transposition of moral into cognitive relativism is a culturalist determinism in the treatment of history. The objective of such a treatment of history is seen to be the specification of particularities and their endowment with valences independent of the universality generally attributed to historical forces, such as economies, technologies, and cognate structural elements. One example of this is a textbook of the history of Muslim peoples which quite explicitly and deliberately excludes treatment of the economy, on the grounds that it is the non-material elements which distinguish this history from other “societies” with similar ecological characteristics and modes of production, and constitute uniquely “the significant terms of historical individuation.”⁶ Similarly but far more reflexively, a firmer synthesis, along vaguely Weberian lines, is made of what are taken to be the institutions and conceptions constitutive of historical individuality in medieval Muslim and West European histories with view to constructing impermeable and intransitive historical types. Needless to say, historical closure so conceived goes counter to historical reality.⁷

While the reality of particularity is incontestable, it is doubtful that its proper apprehension and the discursive expression of such apprehension is an attainable epistemological utopia. Before broaching this subject and its correlates in the post-modern approach to history and society, some further remarks on culturalism are in order. By culturalism I understand the view that regards an entity termed “culture” to be the determining moment in the history and present condition of an historical mass. An historical mass, in this sense, is one whose imputed distinctiveness, individuality, and indeed whose very name—the West, Islam, this “community” or that—is taken to subtend a culture so specific and irreducible as to be in itself constitutive of both the history and of the present condition of this mass, or at the very least to be the element that over-determines its other elements, and totalizes them as mere manifestations of a prior substance. Culturalism is consequently the essentialist view that regards conceptual and imaginary representations to be the ultimate and irreducible constraints at work in the life of the historical mass in question.

Such culturalist contentions are made, implicitly or explicitly, despite the fact that social and historical life demonstrates to us daily that not all social and historical constraints are conceptual, and that although cultures are in a certain sense genetically transmitted and do indeed use genetic traits—ethnographic detail, real or imagined, a genealogy and pseudo-history of uniqueness and continuity, of the West or of Islam for instance—as symbols and markers, yet this is not sufficient ground for asserting that societies, or historical masses, are perpetuated by cultures.⁸ Still less is it legitimate to assert that what are imprecisely known as cultures have an absolutely determinant role in setting the constitution of a given historical mass, or that culture is in itself a sufficient defining element in this mass, or that culture over-determines a given history to such an extent that it—culture—is in itself not only the chief iconic marker of this mass, but is also substantively representative of an inner nature ascribed to it.

We have here of course a replacement of history by ethnology, in terms of a culturalist differentialism very much reminiscent of the natural-historical moulds by which anti-Enlightenment trends construed history. This construal takes certain ethnological markers as icons of an abiding *Volksgeist*, and regards them as criteria for an historical and ethnological taxonomy in which the distinction between natural and human history is lost.⁹ Human history is replaced by a notion of historical individuality so singular and irreducible that the multiplicity of historical masses is conceived in terms of impermeability. Thus, with Herder, what consequential progress as occurs in human history is specific to nations which, with Fichte, or Hegel for example, hand over progress to higher levels from the one to another, while preserving the essential World Spirit that might, after causing these particular histories to fulfill their world-historical duties, cause them in consequence to revert to historical abeyance, indeed to the a-historicity of their essence (thus, for example, the fate of oriental nations with Hegel).

Thus, Edmund Burke, for instance, spoke in this spirit of the “method of nature,” of an historical mass as a “permanent body composed of transitory parts,”¹⁰ in order to indicate an instinctivist concept of the historical mass conceived as a nature. The far more systematic formulations of Herder fully deployed the organismic metaphor¹¹ and conceived historical masses to be powered by *Kräfte*, vital genetic forces effected, but not determined by ecological and other factors. Further, and in terms of the same medieval conception of nature, Herder conceived the constitution of an historical mass—the nation—to consist of a pre-existing condition of perfection awaiting accom-

plishment, an Aristotelian entelechy, whose maintenance by internal vital powers is the condition for historical stability, indeed for abiding historicity.¹² Nations or cultures are therefore utterly and irreducibly individual, according to a naturalist morphology of history described by Collingwood, with reference to the roughly congruent conception of Spengler, as “a deliberate and painstaking attempt to extrude from history everything that makes it historical.”¹³ History therefore becomes a vast space for the classification and tabulation of ethnological individualities in a manner that joined together romantic philosophies of history with nineteenth century social-Darwinist anthropology.¹⁴

This vitalist notion of history rests upon an ontology of substances and essences, which are taken to constitute cultures, identities, selves, and absolute historical subjects in the conceptual context of the vitalism and organism. These together form the ground of the current reclamations of identity, subjectivity, and culture. The constituent notion of this substance is that of a homeostatic historical subject, which is at once self-sufficient and self-evident, which is self-identical over time, whose rhythm and tempo are prescribed by internal organismic mechanisms of system maintenance and essential continuity. The passage of time is therefore merely contingent, inessential; all change that is perceptible and which might appear consequential is not relegated to any proper notion of historicity, but is conjugated with the neo-Platonic notion of materiality—here, temporality—as privation. Time becomes the element which is merely material, unreal, evanescent, being only in that it tends towards non-being, according to Augustine;¹⁵ whereas the essence—often confused with the textual or historico-mythological as in the discourse of religious and national fundamentalism—becomes the spiritual, the cultural, whose diminution can never result from the inside, but is ever caused by heteronymous interference.

Thus cultures and nations might rise and fall, but they do not change in any serious sense, and the wheel of fortune is animated, quite literally, by internal, intransitive, self-subsistent impulses (Herder’s *Kräfte*), which together can be described by the term *Volksgeist*—Spengler spoke of the aesthetic spirit of the ancient Greeks, the Promethean ethos of the West, of the religious nature of many Oriental civilizations. The term *Volksgeist* is wonderfully apposite, certainly, but it is grounded in a foundation of ahistorical vitalism replete with associations with medieval natural-philosophical notions of somatic composites, sustained by the *anima* which is said to make possible the realisation of its very materiality of an historical mass. Furthermore, the term derives much of its rhetorical force from assertions called forth by its psychologistic meta-

phor of the individual, according to which the collective self is construed as individual subject.¹⁶

Fundamental to this conception of history as the history of a spirit or a culture, is the implicit assumption of homogeneity. This historical mass is characterised and individuated by a *Geist*, a soul, a genius, which has also taken various other names, such as “pattern,” value, meaning,¹⁷ the latter being one of the least meaningful notions in the cultural sciences. With the transitions, under the signature of post-modernism, from notions of society to those of representation, from evolutionism to incommensurability, sight was lost of a number of fundamental facts concerning the social reality of history, and of the labour of time. Not the least of these facts is that knowledge and representation, even in small-scale societies, are distributed and controlled; that cultures are webs of mystification no less than of signification, and that local stratification and other forms of diversity render questionable notions such as that of “shared meaning” or *Weltanschauung*, notions which are ever compromised by the *metis* of daily life. Indeed, “meanings,” including memories, in order to transit from inner conception to the collective supposition of meaning or of recollection, will need discursive representation. When not entirely solipsistic, such a discursive representation is always formulaic, typological, subject to a myriad of rhetorical and institutional conventions that memorialise it, subject to the usual conditions and procedures of collective representation, most pertinently the mythical.

Facts such as these would invite the inversion of the Geertzean thesis that ideology be a cultural system, into the assertion that what are taken for cultural systems might be regarded as ideologies. The notion of culture as an unmodifiable system to which novelties are impurities, and in which all disturbances lead to crises—of “identity”—has no justification in the historical reality of any historical mass, although it is politically active in the context of collective mystification.

The dissolution of knowledge into representation risks a constitutive incoherence; for the declared hostility to grand narratives does subtend a grand narrative of the local, the incommensurable, and the irrational. In the spirit of post-colonial naturalism, one author, admittedly with an excess of zeal in the transposition of ostensibly salutary political and moral imperatives into epistemological imperatives, not uncharacteristic of this academic milieu, calls for “increasing incommensurability” and of the necessity of rebutting any notion of a unitary world-history, open to comparativism, as “politically disempowering and destructive of the ecological plurality of knowledges and lifestyles.”¹⁸

The result of such attitudes in historical study risk falling victim to clichés, to culturalist determinism, reinforcing dominant views being contested, and being constituted as derivatives and inversions of the derided Enlightenment.¹⁹

There is an epistemological complement to this essentialist notion of supra-historical masses, as a means of access to it, leading to its narration. For correlative with the social instinctivism which arises out of this view of trans-historical abeyance is an irrationalist epistemology which I shall term sympathetic differentialism. The notion that social and historical knowledge is bounded by certain conditions of emergence—"cultural" conditions, or diffused instances of the exercise of power as with Foucault, which according to the culturalist protocol have replaced the psychologistic explanations of classical scepticism—and indeed, extending sensitivity to this notion to yield a sceptical epistemology approaching intuitionism, is combined with a romantic notion of the immediacy of the act of knowing. The result is that the proper procedure for attaining adequate knowledge of a life-world defined by its self-enclosure, is a phenomenological description, an act of immediate apprehension whose primary vehicle is sympathy.

Thus, Hamann was probably the first to speak of passionate understanding. Herder recommended *Einfühlung*, and Schleiermacher and, more pertinently, Dilthey, consecrated *Verstehen*.²⁰ This epistemology of relativistic life-worlds, really a model for the very fragmentary apprehension of these worlds rather than a fully-fledged epistemology, rests implicitly on an historical and culturalist redaction of the innate ideas concept. It regards knowledge of cultures and their histories to be absolutely bounded by their essential conditions of emergence, and therefore postulates a certain correspondence between cultural-historical knowledge and its object, in such a way that being and knowing become, in principle, indistinct. In this epistemological standpoint deriving from *Lebensphilosophie*, life and history are connected in such a way that history is no more and no less than the realisation of life, of the *Volksgeist* in speaking of historical masses. Reason becomes multiple, reflecting the multiplicity of life-worlds, and its construal is solicited by postmodernists from the "voices" of these life-worlds. In this perspective, knowledge can be either autochthonous and thus spontaneously generated, or external, achieved by an act of inscription, by the knowing other, and through an act of differentialist sympathy, within the essence of this Other. From this location of transcendental conversation, the knower can register the spontaneous voice of the self become, albeit only virtually, object of apprehension but not of knowl-

edge, of (very imperfect) audition but not of comprehension. In practical terms, this apprehended Other can therefore be represented only in his or her own terms, that is to say, through a procedure of a crude and unreflected empiricism. Such is the sense of privileging the “subject-position,” in which the object-subject’s self-representation, as the authentic voice, is taken as a register of essential reality which passes under the title of “meaning.”

Of course, “meanings” are situational and as a consequence multiple, and no “meaning” describes a “culture,” let alone prescribe its history. Yet the discourse, historical no less than pseudo-sociological and in the cultural studies mould, on the radical otherness of cultures, times and histories, postulates that cross-historical and cross-cultural knowledge has conditions distinct from the conditions of knowledge in general. In this it performs primarily an act of classification rather than one of understanding. For in its search for essences and inwardness, for meanings and authenticities, the culturalist knowledge of history in fact becomes a record of alterities, its comparativism a differentialist contrastivism. The act of sympathy here is not only sympathetic, but is also differentialist, and differentialism, good intentions apart, is a taxonomic enterprise in which the language of the Self is taken for a meta-language of typology²¹ whose elements are generically closed, being already pre-given as self-referential subjects. The result of this can only be, in effect, an antithetical discourse, a system of generic classification whose structure is binary, composed formally of segmentary strings of *Ich* and *Nicht-Ich*. This constitutes, for instance, the analytics of classical orientalist discourse.²²

I cannot dwell here on the narrativity theme in historical writing,²³ and will only indicate that the conclusion deriving from the non-correspondence between narrative and history, that no scientific history is possible, is premised on a notion of historical events as sheer flow, not liable to scientific apprehension, and only representable narratively, the grasp of the narrative assuring passage to the empirical—indeed, here, to the hyper-empirical. The post-modern polemic against scientific history rests on the mirror-image of the positivist suggestion that an adequate account of history is essentially mimetic, an assumption long ago ejected by much of historical scholarship which this polemic still derides in a spirit of triumphalism. Like this positivist suggestion, it rests on assuming event and writing to consist of different grades of the same substance, the one quite simply more abstract than the other. The fundamental fallacy, of course, over and above the mimetic postulate, is that of the equivalence of history and of historicity as a mode of

experience.²⁴ It may well be argued not only that the construal of causalities in historical succession immobilises duration, but that it must do so, despite criticism by Halbwachs and other advocates of “memory” for instance,²⁵ that such a procedure violates *le temps vécu*, extracts change from duration, and creates an artificial duration: scientific knowledge is at best counter-intuitive, and the orchestral times and durations of Braudel and his associates are deliberately constructed, and so they must be for them to yield scientific apprehension.

What is crucial for the present argument is that, in its quest for the resuscitation of the Rest which the history of structures and of grand narratives is alleged to have marginalised and belittled, the neo-romantic historiography now taking place under the signature of post-modernism, is rejecting, wholesale, considerations of structure in favour of substance.²⁶ True, the Rest—the historical saliency of matters national, subaltern, cultural, religious, and so forth—is “impervious to theoretical debunking.”²⁷ But the revanchist romantic revivalism correlative with the critique of the Enlightenment, tends to ignore actually existing mutabilities, structural and other, that came as a result of the Enlightenment,²⁸ and ends in its quest for organismic substance by extruding intelligibility from the process of knowledge, and relegates it to the singular, and therefore relative, voice of the object of this knowledge.²⁹

Of course, in connection with the narrativist turn, it is not always the case that a case against objectivism is made from arguments concerning “power” or “interest.” It is not always made by representatives of positions that might be described as Foucaultian or Saidian, usually limited to polemics against histories conceived in the spirit of the Enlightenment, but is also made by scholars attentive to the rhetorical and tropological structure of historical narratives much more broadly conceived. White³⁰ had put forward a most convincing case for a certain mode of scepticism which, while indeed quite rightly criticising the “cognitive irresponsibility” of certain historiographic tendencies, maintains on grounds elaborated in great detail and with exemplary rigour that of the modes of historical narrative available, at least in the nineteenth century, do not permit, on adequate theoretical or historical grounds alone, the emergence of definite preferences.

While fully accepting White’s suggestion that a metatheory might be the way forward to resolve the problem of mutually exclusive and socio-ideologically competing narratives,³¹ I would suggest that such a metatheory might lie less in the distinction between historical and natural sciences—a matter that exercised German historical thought very

energetically, particularly by neo-Kantians, at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries—than in turning attention from narrative to structure, and incorporating history into the ambit of social science methods both analytical and descriptive, as was attempted by the School of the *Annales*, with its problematisation of time and conscious construction of objects of historical study.³² There would also be a case for adjudging preferences and credibilities of narrative accounts of history from a sociology of knowledge angle, taking account both of the sociology of historical knowledge and of the objective cumulativeness of what Mannheim termed “perspectivism.”³³

Be that as it may, the neo-romantic historiography under discussion, it is true, is less oriented towards large-scale units (unless they be Others: the Enlightenment, other Ethnoi, nations, and so forth), and more towards redeeming the local, the micro-historical, the hyper-particular, the quotidian, and other matters that merge with pure duration, with the eternity of human substances. But this is conceptually equivalent to the preoccupation with grand historical narratives: what we have are grand narratives of small-scale events, romances, and epics of the singular. Both rest on notions of the individual organism. The post-modern version is congruent conceptually with the older, reactionary prototype, and is largely derived from its traces, through demotic notions of *Gemeinschaftlichkeit* no less than from the politics of populist demagoguery, whose salience is most often underestimated. The connections sometimes claimed for it with notions of *mentalités* of the *Annales* School is fictitious, for this latter is conceived in terms of different conceptual parameters with emphases on structure,³⁴ and only becomes serviceable when severed from its conceptual discipline and endowed with the attributes of a substance: the *longue durée* is a structure, a mode of abeyance and of configuration, not a substance, just as France herself—unless France be taken for a fiction—is not the substance of French history, and her history is not the history of a pre-given substance, but of evolving configurations which structure the connection between elements of the ecological, political, demographic, and other orders.³⁵

Finally, historiographic neo-romanticism of the individual, the partial, the local, and the marginal, while it does indeed reconstitute rhetorically the sense of uncertainty, of non-determination, has tended to do so by a denial of structure, not by the revision of this notion. This denial is implicit in its marginalization of structures, mutabilities, generalities, and permeabilities, in the name of restituting a prior and mightier, more durable, ontological weight. Instead of this being a

change of *scale* of observation, with attendant conceptual, methodological, and technical consequences, it is becoming a submission to the finality of the individual³⁶—less the further refinement and therefore empowerment of the historical gaze, than its abandonment to the ostensible voice of Nature.

The notion of time is subject to particular reconfiguration in light of the neo-romantic doctrine of history under discussion. The denial of putative determinism is premised on a sub-text which has been encountered above and is often ringingly pronounced, the denial of Enlightenment teleology. The finality endowed to the individual, be this a supra-historical unit like the nation or an infra-historical individual like a community, occurs invariably, therefore, in conjunction with a particular notion of time. Time becomes an element internal to the substance that constitutes the substrate both of history and of historicity; it carries no burden of synchronicity, anachronism, or asynchronicity with respect to other substances, other identities, or to the variety of chronometric times internal to each individual historical substance. Its time is bereft of chronometry and is in fact a chronography, like that of the mind of God according to St. Augustine's description, and is unconnected to diversity within that identity. It is, like Schelling's pre-historical time of myth, the time of its essence, and the chronometer is the sheer duration of its eternity and of its "inner meaning," of its "memory," to mention a topic much in vogue today.

Hence it becomes possible to speak of two categories of Otherness with respect to an historical mass in terms of "temporal depth... and cultural distance."³⁷ This is a wonderfully rhetorical statement of the consequences attendant upon the culturalist and other essentialist views of history: time *within* is profundity, resource, continuing origin, constant recommencement. Intrinsic to this historical substance is memory which does not abide forgetfulness, which is no more than "temporary desemiotisation," despite its effect on the real.³⁸ On the other hand, contemporaneity *without* is distance, difference and distinctiveness. History *within* is, in this perspective, not so much active time, but changeless essence—nation, culture, or whatever other historical mass may be in question—*sub specie temporalis*. History in fact becomes genealogy; and genealogy, being the succession of one identity in separate moments, genealogical history devolves typology, where past and present are related by repetition and abeyance.

This will now be illustrated with reference to Islamic revivalist and para-nationalist historiography of the nineteenth century, and to classical Islamic *Heilsgeschichte*, which fit well within this structure of tem-

porality. In this way, a concrete point will be made against claims for culturalist self-enclosure, for the utility of comparativism, and for the trans-cultural ubiquity of historical conceptions, modern and medieval.

Revivalist history

I do not need to treat at any length the standard textbook version of Arab history or of the history of what is known as "Islam." In brief, this is commonly seen to have arisen out of a small bibliocentric religion, which exploded upon the vista of world history as a force of conquest, foisting a novel religion and a Levitical "way of life," with its system of belief, practice, legal organization, social structure, political form, and so forth, all of which correspond to one another, and most of which can ultimately be reduced to textual imperatives. That which is not so reducible is adjudged exogenous, heteronomous, the "influence" of previous times. Yet the world being as it is, this psychodrama was soon defeated, and "Islam" started, very rapidly, on the road to decline, until today, when a "crisis of identity" is exemplified by what is portrayed as an essential incompatibility between authentic culture in reassertion, and forces of "westernization."

I am not here concerned with demonstrating that every one of these assertions is false, but rather with the matter of culturalism, with the culturalist view of history, its essentialism, and hence its pre-emption not only of global history, but of comparativism as well. It is hoped that it will emerge from the following that, taking notions of time in Arabic historical discourses as cases in point, will lead to the reaffirmation both of the utility of a global perspective in which histories might seem to be continuous with each other beyond the etiquette of "cross-cultural" perspectives, and of the capital salience of comparativism. The two modes of historical self-representation in Arab-Islamic history selected for treatment here are the one from the nineteenth century, and another from medieval historical writing.³⁹ It is hoped that this glance will produce a certain measure *Verfremdungseffekt*, of counter-intuitivism given what is regarded as intuitively given to the contemporary imagination in the West, and thereby suggest that matters be totally at variance with what might be expected of the culturalist view.

The nineteenth century witnessed the globalization of certain notions of society, polity, and history, which, albeit of European origin in their theoretical elaboration, became universal modules, everywhere produced and reproduced. Of these were ideas of representation, of the people, of sovereignty, of the nation, and the correlative notion of authenticity,

truth to the essence of an abiding history. The Ottoman Empire, centrally and provincially (Greece, the Arab World, the metropolitan Armenian intelligentsia and commercial classes), was certainly no exception. Authenticity was a concept deployed in order to construe national political identity in a process of historical formation, and correlatively to identify others. The names given to these units of historical identity in process of formation were various, depending on political conjunctures, social and regional affiliation, and a variety of other matters. Suffice it to say here that the notion of an Islamic politico-cultural internationalism came to arise in the subaltern ranks of the Ottoman reformist state administration, in many ways not dissimilar to the German *Bildungsbürgertum*, in the middle part of the nineteenth century, and was to be adopted later on, under the Sultan Abdülhamid II, as state policy.

In common with other subaltern revivalist currents,⁴⁰ as with defensive, retrenching nationalisms and with populist ideologies, the notion of authenticity is widely used both in formal discourse on matters political and social and in the interstices of casual comment. The notion of authenticity is not so much a determinate concept as it is a node of associations and interpellations, a trope by means of which the historical world is reduced to a particular order, and a token which marks off social and political groups and forges and reconstitutes historical identities.⁴¹ In these senses the notion of authenticity has analogues elsewhere, doubtless officiated under different names, and a famous career in Germany from the end of the eighteenth century.

Asāla is the Arabic term for authenticity. Lexically, it indicates salutary moral qualities like loyalty, nobility, and a sense of commitment to a specific social group or a set of values, *virtú*. It also indicates a sense of exclusive historical individuality, and in association with the senses previously mentioned, *asāla* specifically refers to genealogical standing: noble or at least respectable descent for humans, and the status of equine aristocrats. Combined together and transferred to an attribute of historical collectivities, Arab, Muslim, or other, *asāla* becomes a central notion in a romantic conception of history, which calls forth features commonly associated with such a conception. Of primary importance among these features is a vitalist concept of nationalism and of politics, replete with biological metaphor discussed above and, occasionally, a sentimentalist populism.

Ultimately, therefore, the notion of authenticity is predicated on the notion of an historical subject, which is at once self-sufficient and self-evident. Its discourse is consequently an essentialist discourse, much

like the reverse it finds in Orientalism, in discourses on the primitive, and in other discourses on cultural otherness. In common with these discourses, the discourse on authenticity postulates an historical subject which is self-identical, essentially in continuity over time, and positing itself primarily in distinction from other historical subjects, which are commonly construed in terms of alterity, as non-selves.

For the historico-discursive viability of an historical subject such as this, it is essential that its integrity must be posited and asserted against a manifest backdrop of change of a very rapid and profound nature, a matter of particular salience to the nineteenth century. It therefore follows that change would be conceived as contingent, impelled by inessential matters like external interference or internal subversion, the effects of which can only be confronted with a reassertion of the essence of historical subjectivity. History therefore becomes an alternance of decadence and health, and historiographical practice comes to consist in the writing of history as a form of classification of events under the two categories of intrinsic and extrinsic, the authentic and the imputed, the essential and the accidental, what Muslim authors and much western scholarship terms as Islamic and non-Islamic or un-Islamic.

It is therefore not fortuitous or haphazard that the title under whose name this discourse (and its political implications) was officiated in the nineteenth century should be revivalism, *nahda*, in line with similar historical and ideological experiences of which the *Risorgimento* readily comes to mind. For this entire ideological trope can be described as one of ontological irredentism, it being the attempt to retrieve an essence prior to mere time, an essence that the vicissitudes of time and the designs of enemies, rather than change of any intrinsic nature, had caused to atrophy.

The counterpart of this was that the degraded conditions under which advocates of *nahda* thought they were living are construed as mere corruptions of the original cultural essence, the retrieval of which is only possible by a return to the pristine beginnings which reside in the early years of Islam, the teachings of the book of God, the Koran, and the example of the Prophet Muhammad. It must be added at the outset, however, that though revivalism was initially Islamist, and has tended to don the Islamist cloak anew in the very recent past, it received its most thorough grounding in the context of secular Arab nationalist ideology, which regarded Islam as but one moment in a glorious history that preceded it and continued after it. Indeed, just as modern European historical writing has assimilated ancient Greece to its history, without much real justification, modern Arab nationalist historiogra-

phy has assimilated to its axis of continuity the histories of Babylon and Assur, and occasionally the essential moments in the universal history of monotheism.

In historical terms and returning to Islamist historical conceptions, this constellation of notions came into currency in the second half of the nineteenth century, first with the Young Ottomans in Istanbul, and particularly Namik Kemal (1840–88), and shortly thereafter in the writings of the remarkable Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839–97). Afghānī was not a profound thinker, but a very potent speaker and charismatic conspirator. His careers in Istanbul, Tehran, Kabul, Hyderabad, Calcutta, Cairo, London, Paris, and St Petersburg have left an important imprint on pan-Islamism in the Arab World, which, in certain respects at this time, can be regarded as a form of proto-nationalism. Afghānī left a body of miscellaneous writings, most notably his polemic against the pro-British Indian Muslim reformer Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–98),⁴² with whose ideas, it must be stressed, his were not really at variance. He inspired the journal *Al-‘Urwa al-wuthqā*, a collaborative body of political, cultural and reformist writing published in Paris in 1882–83 with his then disciple, Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905), who was later to become the Arab World’s foremost and most subtle Muslim reformist.⁴³ A section of ‘Abduh’s writings are in tune with the general theses of Afghānī, but they are far more finely tuned and retain none of Afghānī’s crudeness of conception, and ‘Abduh’s disciples numbered some of the Arab World’s foremost Muslim reformist and nationalist leaders in the early part of the past century.

This same constellation of notions was channelled into the mainstream of Arab political and social thought through the nationalism which was later to become Turkish nationalism exemplified in Ziya Gökalp (1875–1924) and the Arab nationalism of his erstwhile associate, Sati‘ al-Husri (1880–1968),⁴⁴ although Husri was not a romantic revivalist and populist like Gökalp, and romantic revivalism was only to enter Arab nationalism between the wars in synchrony with European irrationalism, with strong opposition from Husri. Husri was a sober positivist and educationalist, who believed nations, in the form of the nation-state, were the most advanced form of human association, and not the re-assertion of a pre-existent mystical entity.

The nation for Afghānī is akin to a body, although he changed his mind over what constituted a nation. In the final analysis he devalued ties of ethnicity and, to a lesser extent, of language to the advantage of the bond of religion. A nation consists of estates analogous to parts of a body, or of individuals whose organic unity is that of the parts of a

vital organism. This organism is infused with a vital force like that which permeates its individual organs, and the power of this individual vitality is directly proportional to that in the whole organism.

This organismic, vitalist paradigm, like Herder's, has its major notions—if not its object, a socio-political order—in medieval natural philosophy. Equally important is that it naturally invites comparison with Herder's notion of *Kräfte* as inner sources of vitality and dynamic principles for the continued existence of nations; the question as to whether this romanticism is medieval in its immediate conceptual inspiration is irrelevant to its modernity and to the vital part it played in nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideological tendencies. Though Afghānī's ideas were initially shaped in Iranian seminaries, they were received not in Qom but in Calcutta, Cairo, Istanbul, and Paris, where they were filtered through contemporary social and political categories. Also like Herder's, Afghānī's paradigm concretises this vital principle for the unity and cohesion of bodies national in culturalist terms and, like Herder's emphasis on *Bildung*, finds in civic and moral education the key to the maintenance and resuscitation of national glory. The vital spirit in empirical terms is a yearning in the hearts of men for glory and a longing for the consummate realisation of values. And this vital spirit is operative only when it impels bodies national with a desire for excellence and distinction in wealth as well as glory and might (*ʿizz*).

In situations of conflict brought about by pervasive Western interference in the Middle East, this perspective was not unnaturally invested with a social-Darwinist stance. It is well to bear in mind that the "conflict theory" of political sociology was emerging in Germany at about the same time—proponents of this theory, like Afghānī and the early 'Abduh, were keenly interested in Ibn Khaldūn's theory of the power of state, which they used in the construction of a nationalist romanticism.⁴⁵ The struggle for existence, Afghānī tells us, pervades human history no less than in the animal kingdom and inanimate nature. The reason for this is that "might is the visible aspect of life and of continued existence ... and might is never triumphant and concrete except when it weakens and subjugates others." As an illustration, Afghānī cites the powers of nations and specifically the subjugation of the Ottoman Empire by the European powers.⁴⁶

What, in this perspective, is history? And what does the passage of time yield? The subject of history is the body national. Each body national, as in Herder and many others, is a fixed nature which is, according to the characterisation of Collingwood, less the product of history than its presupposition. That unit which is historically signifi-

cant is the national subject, and history is therefore one of alternance between true historicity manifested in might, and historical desuetude manifested in subjugation. Might results from cohesiveness and unity, and if this unity were to be lost, the body national would lose its spirit or its general will, with the result that “the thrones of its might will fall, and it [the nation] will take its leave of existence just as existence had abandoned it.”⁴⁷ It is indicative of Afghānī’s style that he used the term *quwwa hāfiza*, which I have rendered as “spirit.” The expression, literally “preservative power,” is derived from medieval Arabic natural philosophy, in which Afghānī was deeply steeped and concepts from which he often used, where it designates the subliminal quality which keeps together a somatic composite, as a variation on the Aristotelian notion of entelechy.

The cohesiveness and unity of this body national infused with a vital impulse that yearns for glory is maintained so long as the factors which originally constituted this *Volksgeist* are operative. But once corruption sets in, once the essence is diluted, the auguries of national calamity become manifest. Thus the glorious classical civilization of the Muslim Arabs was corroded from the inside by the snares of esotericist sects, which paved the way for conquest by Crusaders and Mongols. Similarly, the fabric of the Ottoman Empire was weakened by Ottoman westernising reformists in the middle of the nineteenth century. As for the French, the glory of their royal past was corrupted by the snares of Voltaire and Rousseau, which directly led to what Afghānī regarded as the calamities of the French Revolution, the Paris Commune, and defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. In the same class of universally destructive, disintegrative impulses are socialism, communism, and anarchism, which might cause the annihilation of humanity altogether, being for Afghani the ultimate forces of corruption and radical antinomianism, the antithesis of order and civilization.

There is no adequate response to weakness and destruction save that of revivalism: the retrieval and restoration of the original qualities that made for strength and historical relevance. No progress without the retrieval of pristine beginnings and the cleansing of the essence from the adulteration of history: such is the fundamental principle of revivalism. The Islam that results from the elision of history and the deprivation of time of any significant ontological weight will shortly be taken up; but before this is done it is necessary to take a closer look at the categories that subsist in the trope of authenticity, of absolute individuality and irreducible historical subjectivity.

The trope of authenticity, described above as less a determinate concept than a node of associations, is premised on a number of important notions and distinctions. Fundamental among these is a conception of history which posits a narcissistic continuing subject, mighty by virtue of its nature but enfeebled by subversion, inadvertence and what Hegel termed “Oriental ease and repose.” This same subject will regain its vital energy and continue the maintenance of its nature—its entelechy—by a recommencement and by the revivification of its beginnings, which will subsist within it just as a nature, in the classical and medieval Arabic and European senses, inheres in a body.

But this subject is inconceivable in isolation from others, which exist alongside it, for the notion is essentially formed in the context of political contestation, and conceptually, of antithesis. These others are construed to a very considerable degree, to be absolute in their otherness, in that they are taken for antitheses of the subject, and, in order for them to be met, their subjectivity has constantly to be objectified, deprived of value except for that which, like forces of corruption, is inessential and contingent. Such was the attitude of Afghānī and all those who adopted the hopes associated with his name towards modern science and technology, of European provenance but not culture-specific and, moreover, necessary for the construction of national might. Throughout, the origin—the positive beginning—is adulterated, but still flows as a subliminal impulse amid degradation and corruption, for the fall from previous heights is inessential, and the essence of this historical subject is in fact supra-historical and still subsists in the innermost core of the cultural self. The revivalist project is simply one in which this core is again brought to the surface and to the forefront of historical existence, thereby restoring the historical subject to its true nature.

The truth of this nature is an ontological truth, one whose resistance to the vagaries of time is demonstrated by the revivalist belief in its capacity for resuscitation, and whose proposed durability is the measure of its truth. Indeed, this nature, the vital impulse of the body national, is the very reality of the subject in history; corruption is conceivable only as privation in this neo-Platonic cosmography of historical time. In the light of this, history consists of continuity over a time which knows no substantive causalities, hence no breaks and mutations, but simply abeyances of historical substance, reflected in feebleness. This continuity is in a constantly antithetical relation to all otherness: to all nations, which by virtue of the very nature of bodies naturally seek to subjugate the nation-subject, and to corruptions within, for these are

privations of the essence which seek to subvert, and thus to nullify, the vital energy which uplifts and allows for glory.

Time is therefore cleft between origins and corruptions, between authenticity and the snares of enemies. Forces of privation, of foreign—that is, inessential—provenance, have no intrinsic extensions: they do not extend to the core of the historical self, for they have no avenues that lead to the fund of subjectivity, either in the past or in the present. They have bearings neither in the past nor in the ontological reality of the present. Extraneous influences disturb the homogeneity of the subject and confound the bearings of its historical course by repudiating the original inner indistinctness and homogeneity, which constitute the stuff of authenticity.

Authenticity, for a contemporary Arab philosopher who has been attempting a left-wing reclamation of Afghānī along the lines of a Muslim liberation theology, designates the self in contradistinction to the other as the essential as against the accidental, the natural as opposed to the artificial, the autonomous as opposed to the heteronymous. Only thus can individuality and specificity properly be said to designate any genuine distinctiveness in opposition to “the loss of distinctiveness and dissolution in another specificity [of the West] which claims universality,” a statement that might have been made by any of a myriad of post-colonial intellectuals world-wide, including crucially in universities in the United States. Authenticity and its associated notions are, further, said to extend the cultural ego into history and endow it with “historical continuity and temporal homogeneity and the unity of the national personality.”⁴⁸ This concordance with post-modernist discourse is noticeable, but unremarkable, for they both partake of the same universal neo-romanticist tropes.

Authenticity is therefore both past and future linked contingently by the ontological void of today. The past is the accomplished future and the future is the past reasserted; history is the past in the future anterior. History is an even continuum, on the surface of which fly chance eddies which counter the original energies of the continuum and work to suppress them, yet do not quite succeed in more than rippling the surface and disturbing its evenness. Only thus can teleology be assured: for a nature to consummate itself, for the future revival to close the circle of historical appearance and coalesce with the original condition, the end must be pre-given and inevitable in the sense that it is in accord with nature.

The body national is thus neither describable nor recognisable if measured against its contingent existence, or against sheer temporality,

identified with evanescence, and the lack of perfection that characterise it today. Time is devoid of quality, corruption is purely vicarious, and the present is but a negative interregnum between a fully accomplished, entirely ample origin, and its recommencement at the moment of revival, which is also its consummation. History therefore takes place in “two modes of time, one of which has a decided ontological privilege,”⁴⁹ the one relevant to the essence and a measure of its duration, and the other which dissolves into transience and contingency. The former is much like the time of myth as described by Schelling in his *Philosophie der Mythologie* quoted at the opening of this article, which will be revisited later. The latter is the active time of history, whose activity is regarded as purely virtual.

The connection of these modes of time is the same as that of different bodies national: a connection of otherness which, in a social-Darwinist world, is one of subjugation and antinomy, essentially of negation, without the possibility of a mutual interiorization such as that inherent in, for example, the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave. Indeed, the polar structuration of the discourse on authenticity is what makes it possible not only to deny essential change over time, thus denying multiplicity over time, but also to deny what we might term spatial multiplicity of any essential consequence, this being the social, political, and ideological multiplicity at any one particular point in time, except in so far as such multiplicity is perceived as subversive of a homogeneous essence which requires evenness. Any unevenness, as has already been indicated, is perceived in terms of antithesis, privation, corruption, and atrophy. This national subject is an essence which knows neither dysfunction nor transformation, but only abeyance.

This subject is pure self-reference, a tautological circle, whose impenetrability to reason other than the reason of its own self-reference is very much in keeping with similar outlooks in the German *Lebensphilosophie*, where life is at once the subject and the object of the mind. The authentic self is immediately apprehended,⁵⁰ and knowledge of it by its own is a sort of pure and perfect *Verstehen*, an almost innate endowment in the mind of the components that make up this body national, whose self-enclosure is epistemological and not only ontological. Indeed, as we have seen above in connection with sympathetic epistemology, the epistemological and the ontological correspond perfectly, for knowledge of authenticity is but a moment in the life of this authenticity manifested as will. For what is such knowledge of a self-identical entity but a form of transcendental narcissism? Indeed, Afghānī specifically designates the *Bildung* of the renascent nation as

one whose prime medium is an oratory which exhorts and reminds of the past.⁵¹

It should be clear from the foregoing that the subject being corrected by oratorical education, and which is romantically conceived both beyond history and underlying it, is indeterminate if its conception is left as presented. There are no indications towards its determination except gestures towards historical particularities: events, names and dates. Beyond this there is reference to one nominative term: Islam. There are analogues to this romantic mode in virtually all modern histories. In all these cases, in the absence of historical determination over and above the indication of a foundational first time of archetypes, the discourse of authenticity is socially open, in the sense that its essential emptiness, what Hegel might have termed the boredom of its concepts, renders it very versatile and protean. As this ontological self-identity is epistemologically reflected in solipsism, the result is that the construction of identities here is fundamentally an act of naming.

Naming is not an innocent activity, but lies at the very heart of ideology, one of whose principal mechanisms is the operation of classificatory tokens that determine the memberships of socio-political groups. These operations also entail exclusions and inclusions by way of condensations, displacements and associative interpellation of some complexity. The concrete images put forward as factually paradigmatic—the Golden Age, the glories of the Arabs, the Middle Ages in some European romanticisms and nationalisms, the idyllic rusticity of Heidegger, of African nativist philosophers, or westernised Indian sages—serve as iconic controllers of identities and take on general values generated by a truncated and telescoped history. Yet these are values which act as carriers of general attributes that no human collectivity can eternally possess, and carry a paradigmatic value that is only imputed to them by the purveyors of the ideological messages. The versatility of the general name—such as Islam—lies therein.

The abstract act of naming engenders as many distinct identities as there are constituted social and political groups which might claim the name as their own. The reality of the historical subject lies not in the head but in historical reality, and the key to this reality is not the conformity to some self-subsistent essence or some invariant historical Islam which does not exist, but the group which adopts the name by adapting it to its particular form and understanding of the historical paradigm evoked by the name, a paradigm which is metonymically suggested and not specifically indicated by the name itself. The connection between name and historical reality derives its validation and

credibility from extrinsic criteria, from the capacity that the group adopting the name has to enforce and consolidate its interpretation and to perpetuate it within institutions both epistemic and social.

It will be clear from the foregoing that romantic and the neo-romantic culturalist notion of history as the history of individuality, described in connection with nineteenth-century European thought and with late twentieth-century post-modernism, is in all important respects congruent with the romantic notions of history current among some circles in the late Ottoman Empire. That both find their organismic notions of history and of society in the demotic residues of medieval conceptions of nature (associations with entelechy, matter and form, being and privation) is incontrovertible. What is particularly striking is not the medievalism but the contemporaneity, a reflection of the universality, albeit uneven, of the rhythms of intellectual and political currents from the middle of the nineteenth century. Such medieval natural-scientific notions, before Herder, were quite unusual in the systematic treatment of history and society, one particularly notable exception being, of course, Ibn Khaldūn.⁵²

Culturalism is therefore not relevant to gauging the manner in which another “culture” regards history: more germane to this is the analysis of historical discourse, with the full knowledge that this is one manner of conceptualising history among others. For in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Arab World has also produced other views of history, the predominant one of which had until recently tended to be positivistic, evolutionist, and nationalist in the sense of regarding nations and nation-states to be the most advanced form of human social and political organization.

Salvation history

But this is a matter that might be treated elsewhere. For the purposes of this study, it is more appropriate to take our second glance at Arabic historical discourse, this time looking at notions of time contained in medieval works. This will reveal that Arab, or putatively Arab-Muslim “culture” from the “beginning” until today, cannot be regarded as one in continuity. Medieval and modern can in no way be said to be in continuity, a continuity ascribed to “culture.” There are yet definite correlations in the typological construals of historical continuity between medieval and certain modern Arab conceptions of history, certainly. But this correlation is more general, extending to medieval and ancient typology, as much as to nationalist historiography in Europe as well as

to nineteenth and twentieth-century romanticism, whose contemporary form is certain strands of post-modernism as described above. For the rest, residues and the radical imperfection and incompleteness of things notwithstanding, the predominant trends of modern Arab historical writing are academically grounded on conceptual principles that are today a cosmopolitan patrimony, and are distinct from medieval writing and not in conceptual continuity with it, although there are, here and there, some affective, symbolic, and mythological continuities.

The scale of medieval Arabic historical writing is colossal.⁵³ We shall concentrate here on the question of typology, in order to return to where this essay started, where the relevance of neo-romantic culturalism was questioned, and with view to showing that the quest for organism, in the notion of time implicit within it, is more in keeping with medieval typology than might be supposed and is, like medieval typology, amenable to study by means of the normal equipment of the humanities and social sciences. That the material used here is Arabic, rather than Latin or Greek, would appear somewhat fortuitous. Though I will leave it to scholars with a better knowledge of medieval European historical writing than I could possibly have, to make comparisons between medieval Arabic and Latin (or Byzantine) historiographies, I think that, in this as many other fields, the formal and conceptual concordances are clear enough to dispel notions of the relevance of “cultural” difference.

Broadly speaking, there were two registers of historicity in medieval Arabic writing. One was technical, which structured annals, chronicles, dynastic histories, biographical dictionaries, and, generally speaking, universal histories. This technical repertoire of historical events depends for its narrative structure and indeed for its definition of historicity and of the event itself, on a punctilious and sometimes minutely chronometric notion of time, comprising events subject to the vagaries of Fortune. The other register deployed a different notion of time: a typological concept of history which arranges events by category rather than by sheer flow of vulgar time, events which may be in some of their original sources dispersed among other events chronologically arranged, but which can in other discursive locations be placed in relations of sequential repetition as prefigurations, figures, types, beginnings, recomencements, and ends.

Medieval Arabic civilization shares an almost universal concern with origins and beginnings of the world, of social order, as of particular artefacts and customs. The cultures of antiquity cultivated this interest in origins⁵⁴ no less than modern industrial civilization, which

with its theories of social contract and its evolutionism is alone in claiming descent from savages and from even lowlier creatures rather than from gods and heroes.⁵⁵ This pursuit of origins provided among other perhaps more important things, explanations for the *status quo* of an historical type based upon a conception of generic continuity over time. Chinese literature knew a distinct literary genre of “techno-historical dictionaries” concerned with the first occurrences of things, systematised in the third century B.C.⁵⁶ Arabic literature has likewise left a rich patrimony on *awā’il* (first occurrences), whose main purpose seemed to have been to provide gems of *recherché* knowledge of an unusual and exotic character, a knowledge that formed part of courtly urbanity, but which also figures predominantly as *exempla* in the large body of Arabic *Fürstenspiegel*, conceptually equivalent to the paradigmatic sayings and actions attributed to the Prophet of Islam, which had legal, behavioural and moral consequence.

This register of “firsts” is a record of archetypes as well as *exempla*, salutary or nefarious and ruinous acts of yore, the material for practical and moral education by means of example, very much like the artisanal learning process based on repetition. This is a demotic notion of education no less than one enshrined in the exemplary register which was the *Iliad*, the “Homeric encyclopaedia,”⁵⁷ in the body of *exempla* belaboured in ancient rhetoric and widely used in medieval European culture, ecclesiastical and secular,⁵⁸ or in the vast repertoire of Muhammadan actions and words which constitute the *hadīth*, an important component of the Muslim canon.

This repertoire of archetypes can be both sacred and profane; in this repertoire, first occurrences inscribe the initial trace of an act, which is subsequently repeated. They are acts of full inauguration. Thus, according to Medieval Arab historians, Alexander was the first man to shake hands, having thus founded the custom. David was the first to have had armour manufactured, incest goes back to a certain proclivity on the part of an ancient Chinese king, Zarathustra founded astrology. Each of these—and others—is a singular act which generically founds similar, subsequent acts, by a process in which the rhythm of time is internalised by each element or occurrence in these series, so that time is achronic, its rhythm being that of the sheer relation of precedent and consequent. The time of each series of events, like the time of myth, is one with neither continuous duration nor chronometric regularity, but one which results in configurations of identical content, divided by boundaries akin in their mode of division to musical bars.⁵⁹ Succession in this sense yields identity. Time only bridges this identity between

precedent and consequent, between type and figure. The signalling of certain dynastic or regnal beginnings by the use of a new calendar performs the complementary and opposite act of identifying difference, the beginning of a new act of inauguration, inaugurating a series of repetitive re-enactments.

Identity in succession is particularly enriched, and indeed is far more consequential in its effects outside this particular successive series, when the archetypal inauguration is of sacred and world-historical significance. These are inaugural events whose repeatability is imperative, and dictate the rhythms of cultic memory and of salvation history, the history of the greatest of all circles of repetition, beginning with a beginning that is absolute and ending with an end which is equally definitive. The passage between the absolute commencement and the absolute end is punctuated by moments of relative repetition, relative because it is not definitively terminal.

Inauguration and re-enactment, the differentia of monotheism,⁶⁰ are thus structurally connected by a relation of repetition and, in terms of time, of recursivity, of closure, and ultimately of definitive closure in the great cycle of historical cycles, which terminates with the apocalypse. Of these great cycles, according to Arabic traditions, the greatest and most durable of course, is the history of prophecy, culminating in Muhammad, and definitively re-enacted in apocalyptic time, when the inessential, the vicarious, and the merely temporal, is ejected from the scheme of things. Indeed, as in Christian historiography, the Fall justifies the existence of historical time,⁶¹ the passage of which ends in redemption.

Thus according to medieval Arab-Muslim historical writing, the first object created by God was the Pen, which was commanded to write "everything," and thus described the entire future course of creation as a register of archetypes and re-enactments. Adam was known by names that betoken his archetypal character. He was called Abū Turāb, the Father of Soil, out of which humanity is fashioned and to which it returns; he was also known as Abū'l-Bashar, Father of Humankind, and Abū Muhammad, the Father of Muhammad who stands for the allegory of the primeval Muhammadan appearance. God taught Adam the entire human lexicon from its most sublime to its most vulgar words, with its verbs and nouns, its superlatives and diminutives. Thus the linguistic order assuring human life was established, as were the skills of agriculture and metalwork, for perpetuity and in definitive generic form. In the same way, the punishments meted out to Eve (the pains of conception and menstruation, a lengthy pregnancy, inferiority to men,

and so forth) marked the lot of womankind for all perpetuity with a misogynist impulse that, however, almost pales into insignificance compared to medieval Christian writing on women. Not dissimilarly, it might be said that the far more benign creation of womanhood in Greek mythology—the fashioning of Pandora in the forge of Hephaestus, her endowment with life by Zeus, falsehood by Hermes, curiosity by Hera, along with beauty, grace, persuasiveness, skill, and other qualities by other gods—is also that of an invariant archetype, as were the contents of Pandora’s box, and various other skills previously imparted to mankind by Prometheus.

Moreover, the sole creed available to Adam was *tawhīd*, an archetypal monotheism, and to him were revealed the fundamental interdictions on eating pork, blood, and carrion. Abraham was the primeval and timeless Muslim *par excellence* and received what are variously thought to be unnamed fundamental generic institutes of the faith or certain exemplary attributes of the faithful, particularly those concerning purity, such as circumcision and the removal of body hair.⁶² He also received and instituted cultic rituals, and most specifically the pilgrimage rites at Mecca. These different articulations of the primeval religion—Islam—at different times and in different settings are ones in which the posterior event recapitulates the anterior. When modifications occur, these do not, in Muslim writing, imply invalidation of that which was subject to modification. They are modifications which can be characterised as no other than consummation in generic continuity, an *Aufhebung*. The specific instances of ritual, as of prophecy, are calques of an invariant beginning completely in keeping with the structures of temporality addressed above. Such calques find completion and closure when profanity is wiped off the face of the earth in the history of the future: this occurs when a series of cataclysms will herald the coming of the Mahdī (the Messiah) and the restoration of the Adamic order in preparation for the day of judgement, a day which consigns profanity to the absurdity of Hell and recommences the Edenic order in Paradise. And indeed, this is truly a history of the future because in conception of fact and narrative it fully conforms to the conventions of historical writing in medieval Arabic letters.

Following the antinomian signs of the Hour and its subversions of Order—the rise of the sun from the west, the unleashing of the destructive force of the Gog and Magog upon the world, the reign of the Dajjāl, the Antichrist, and other events that occur in the history of the future—the decks are cleared for the recommencement of the Adamic order, much as they were with the Deluge. The Messiah is called “Muhammad

Ibn ‘Abd Allāh’: he is the Prophet’s namesake and clansman; in other religious traditions he might well have been considered his avatar. The armies ranged against the Dajjāl are commanded by Jesus, son of Mary, who consummates his primeval reality by overcoming the pre-Muhammadan historical specificity which rendered him inconsummate and shedding the vestiges of erstwhile imperfections following his initial appearances: he breaks the Cross and kills all pigs; he abrogates the toleration canonically extended to non-Muslim Peoples of the Book—Christians, Jews, Sabeans, and Zoroastrians—and accepts no further conversions to Islam, but rather kills all the unconverted. The cosmic counterpart of this recapitulation of the purity of the Adamic order is a similar recapitulation of the precreation order in preparation for the recommencement of all origins: at the coming of the Hour, God commands the angels to die, before they and the rest of creation are resurrected; until then, nothing remains but the Divine Face (Koran, 28:88 and 55:26–7).

Each instance of prophecy, therefore, is a realisation of eschatology, a regeneration of the time of divinity, much as time was regenerated annually in the ancient Near East, by kings, in the Adonisian myth, with the resurrection of Jesus. The detailed rhythms of these recapitulations in their turn recapitulate numerical and chronological accents of the archetype. The number of men who fought alongside Muhammad at the Battle of Badr against the Meccans in A.D. 624 was the same as that of the Israelites who fought Goliath. The day of ‘Ashūrā, the tenth day of the Muslim month of Muharram on which the Passion of Husain is commemorated, is the equivalent of the Jewish Day of Atonement, and is believed by Shi‘ite Muslims to be the day on which God forgave Adam and the day Noah’s Ark landed. In the month of Ramadān the Torah was revealed, no less than the initial verses of the Koran. And much as Christians invested a particular accent in Sunday, being the Lord’s day following the cosmic week and also the day of resurrection, Friday for Muslims is the day on which Adam was created and died and will be the day of the resurrection. For some persons of exceptional piety Friday was so acutely accented that it is said they had a particular preference for sexual intercourse on this day. Al-Mas‘ūdī in the tenth century quoted contemporary Arab Christians as believing the day on which Christ was crucified corresponds to the day Adam was ejected from Heaven and the day he died.

Typological interpretation⁶³ serves as the hermeneutical complement and the mode of apprehension of this serial recursivity, according to which the history of the sacred is conceived as theodicy. The salience

of typology is not sufficiently appreciated by historians, who may think it the preserve of theologians and students of literary genres: yet it is crucial for understanding the very notions of continuity and of influence in historical discourse and in discourses on the past in general. Just as the historical appearance of Jesus in early, and to some extent, in Patristic Christianity, was a proleptic eschatology, so are all historical appearances of divine significance prefigurations of the end or recapitulations of the beginning. Moses could be and was read as *figura Christi*, Noah's Ark as *praefiguratio ecclesiae*,⁶⁴ indeed medieval European kingship was read as *Christomimesis*, as the crowned *typus Christi*, just as medieval Muslim Caliphs were figures of prophecy. Typological repetition stands here, discursively, for what we call causality or influence—indeed causality when thus conceived as repetition and continuity is a figure for the authority allocated to the past.

Type and figure are related in a time which stands outside chronometric time. That this time is also measurable is irrelevant, for along the chronometer the flow of typology—the succession of prophets, for instance—appears as accents of intensity which manifest an erratic immanence, hence of causal repetition, an allegory along the axis of time. Just as, for example, the Battle of Badr is removed from its proper register of local tribal raids, and transposed to the perspective of epiphany when textually read as *jihād*, so are other elements in typological succession removed from history and transposed into the “perspective of eternity” that we have seen exemplarily described by Augustine.⁶⁵ Contrary to the unqualified instants of chronometric time, qualitative continuity is maintained across spaces of this time by the succession rhythms internal to the purposes of theodicy. The time of Providence has its measure within itself. The time of change is evanescent, fortuitous, unqualified, bereft of substance, ontologically dubious.

Not so the time of typology, whose instants are dense with essence: the essence transmitted by typological filiation, the register of genealogy, seminal causality along the continuum of time, which denies any specific gravity to the time of the clock, indeed the time of history, for the latter lacks the generic determination and the generic closure. It is in itself fundamentally meaningless, the companion of events in themselves un-generic with respect to the typological register, and therefore of an ontological status of irredeemable baseness.

This leads us back directly to the essentialist view of history to which reference has been made, in three conceptually congruent moments: neo-romantic and post-modernist, revivalist and cultural-nationalist, and typological. If revivalism, religious or nationalist, and if fundamentalism Christian, Muslim, or Jewish, propound the view that a past can be resuscitated, this is possible only on the grounds of a conception of history which conforms to the essentialism that has been discussed throughout the present study. This is a notion of history which brings together an organismic view of history, one that came into circulation in European romanticism and royalism in the nineteenth century, and a typological concept of time which is naturalistically grounded in the organismic conception of history. Both are, in conceptual prototypes, ancient. But the translation of organism to the study of society, and its combination with typology, is a specifically modern achievement. In the case of contemporary Muslim fundamentalism, for instance, it can be shown that the integralism animating it and based on the presumption that a Golden Age can be integrally reinstated, is a phenomenon of the twentieth century, with no antecedents in actual Muslim traditions,⁶⁶ which relegated redemption to a moment in the eschatological future defining the end of time.

This was an achievement of great moment, which has constituted the bedrock of ideologies of nationalist, para-nationalist, and populist recidivism, and of conservative reaction to the French Revolution, the revolutions of the 1830s and of 1848, and to the Russian Revolution. That a similar romantic quest for organism should again become popular in the context of a *fin-de-siècle* malaise after the end of the Cold War, and that this should manifest itself in the attitude to history, is itself amenable to study and understanding by means of historical reason. The quest for organism, in its culturalist form, is not the key to the understanding of itself, nor of other cultures.

Notes

- ¹ St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* [Loeb Classical Library 413], 11:21.
- ² F. W. J. Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie*, tr. in E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, New Haven, 1955, p. 106.
- ³ A. Demandt, *Metaphern für Geschichte*, Munich, 1978, p. 117.
- ⁴ I. Kant, *Political Writings*, tr. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 201, 215.
- ⁵ See especially W. D. Smith, *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840–1920*, New York, 1991.
- ⁶ I. M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge, 1988, p. xxiii.
- ⁷ M. G. S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History*, Cambridge, 1993, esp. ch. 8; and see B. S. Turner, *Weber and Islam*, London, 1974.
- ⁸ E. Gellner, *Reason and Culture*, Oxford, 1988, pp. 14–5. It is characteristic of this author—and many others—to abandon this cautionary attitude, and to claim that “Muslim Societies” are exceptional.
- ⁹ Cf. A. Al-‘Arwī, *Mafhūm-tārīkh* [The Concept of History], vol. 2, Casablanca, 1992, pp. 361, 367, 403.
- ¹⁰ E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. C. Cruise O’Brien, Harmondsworth, 1969, p. 120; and cf. D. Simpson, *Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt against Theory*, Chicago and London, 1993, pp. 57–8.
- ¹¹ Demandt, *Metaphern*, pp. 442 ff.
- ¹² J. G. von Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, abridged by F. E. Manuel, Chicago and London, 1968, pp. 96–7; and J. G. Herder on *Social and Political Culture*, ed. and tr. F. M. Barnard, Cambridge, 1969, pp. 272 ff., 291 ff. Cf. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford, 1946, p. 92.
- ¹³ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 182.
- ¹⁴ J. Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology makes its Object*, New York, 1983, particularly pp. 15–6, 19.
- ¹⁵ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 11:xiv. There is no implication made here that Augustine was a representative of neo-Platonism; his genius, rather, adapted Platonic and neo-Platonic commonplaces (B. Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, p. 65).
- ¹⁶ Marc Bloch long ago warned against this temptation in his review of Maurice Halbwachs’ *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*: “Mémoire collective, tradition, et coutume,” *Revue de Synthèse Historique* XL (N.S., xiv), 1925, pp. 73–83.
- ¹⁷ See the sober reflections of P. Mercier, “Anthropologie sociale et culturelle,” in *Ethnologie générale* [Encyclopédie de la Pléiade XXIV], ed. J. Poirier, Paris, 1968, pp. 907–9, 915, 918–20.
- ¹⁸ V. Lal, “Provincializing the West: World History from the Perspective of Indian History,” in *Writing World History, 1800–2000*, ed. B. Stuchtey and E. Fuchs, Oxford, 2003, p. 289.
- ¹⁹ J. H. Bentley, “World History and Grand Narrative,” in Stuchtey and Fuchs, *Writing World History*, pp. 48 f.; F. Coronil, “Can Postcoloniality be Decolonized? Imperial Banality and Postcolonial Power,” *Public Culture* 5 (1992), pp. 99 f.

- ²⁰ See in general the excellent account of S. Odoüev, *Par les sentiers de Zarathoustra*, tr. C. Emery, Moscow, 1980, pp. 131 ff.
- ²¹ J. M. Lotman, "On the Metalanguage of a Typological Description of Culture," in *Semiotica* 14/2 (1975), pp. 97 ff.
- ²² A. Laroui, "The Arabs and Cultural Anthropology," in idem, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, pp. 44 ff; A. Al-Azmeh, "Islamic Studies and the European Imagination," in idem, *Islams and Modernities*, 2nd ed., London, 1996, ch. 8; idem, "Ifsāh al-Istishrāq," in idem, *Al-Turāth bayn as-Sultān wa't-tārikh* [Heritage: Politics and History], Beirut and Casablanca, 1990, pp. 61 ff. For similar antitheses in other locations, see François Hartog, *Le miroir d'Hérodote*, Paris, 1980; and Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Barbarians in Arab Eyes," *Past and Present* 134 (1992), pp. 3–18.
- ²³ Suffice it here to refer to the discussion of D. Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, Bloomington, 1986, "Introduction."
- ²⁴ A. J. Greimas, *Sémiotique et Sciences Sociales*, Paris, 1976, p. 168.
- ²⁵ M. Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, ed. G. Namer, Paris, 1997, pp. 166, 189; cf. P. Ricoeur, "The History of Religions and the Phenomenology of Time Consciousness," in *The History of Religions. Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. J. M. Kitagawa, New York and London, 1985, pp. 19 and *passim*.
- ²⁶ For this distinction in history, see most saliently, K. Pomian, *L'ordre du temps*, Paris, 1984, pp. 211 ff. and ch. 4, *passim*.
- ²⁷ See the excellent account of Hegel and Marx's attitudes to Romanticism, in G. Balakrishnan, "The National Imagination," *New Left Review* 211 (1995), pp. 59–61.
- ²⁸ J. Rüsen, *Zeit und Sinn. Strategien historischen Denkens*, Frankfurt, 1990, pp. 240–7.
- ²⁹ Perhaps one of the most amusing instances is a recent article published in *Speculum* on postmodernism in medieval history, which stated that the aim of the enterprise was a non-objectifying and non-authoritarian dialogue with the dead. It is most often imagined that the marginalised Rest waited impatiently for post-modern scholarship to discover it, and I wonder what post-colonialists would think of the properly historical studies of authors such as George Lefebvre on the Great Fear in rural France, George Rudé on the crowd during the French revolution, Friedrich Engels (and, in a different way, Ernst Bloch) on Thomas Müntzer and the peasant war in Germany, Raymond Williams on culture and society, Barrington Moore, Jr. on the social origins of dictatorship and democracy, Eric Hobsbawm on bandits, E. P. Thompson on the English working class and on the sale of wives in rural England, C. L. R. James on Toussaint l'Ouverture and the black Jacobinism in Haiti, and Eric Woolf's magnificent *Europe and the People without History*. To historiographers zealously post-modern I would counsel that reading historical works is highly recommended.
- ³⁰ H. White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, 1973, *passim*.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 429.
- ³² The literature is enormous, but I would single out T. Stoianovich, *French Historical Method. The Annales Paradigm*, Ithaca, 1976.

- ³³ K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, London, 1960, pp. 136ff. and ch. V, *passim*.
- ³⁴ See particularly J. Rancière, *The Names of History. On the Poetics of Knowledge*, tr. H. Melehy, Minneapolis, 1994.
- ³⁵ F. Braudel, *L'Identité de la France*, 2 vols., Paris, 1986.
- ³⁶ Cf. the studies in *Jeux d'échelle. La micro-analyse à l'expérience*, ed. J. Revel, Paris, 1996.
- ³⁷ J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung, und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, Munich, 1992, p. 21.
- ³⁸ R. Lachmann, "Kultursemiotischer Prospekt," in *Memoria Vergessen und Erinnern*, ed. R. Lachmann, Munich, 1993, p. xviii.
- ³⁹ In what follows, I have relied on points developed in more detail and with full documentation in the following of my works: "The Discourse of Cultural Authenticity," in Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, ch. 4; *Al-Kitāba al-tārīkhīya wa'l-ma'rifa al-tārīkhīya* [Historical Writing and Historical Knowledge], 2nd ed., Beirut, 1995; "Chronophagous Discourse" (ch. 3. of this book).
- ⁴⁰ The following paragraphs are based on the author's *Islams and Modernities*, pp. 83 ff.
- ⁴¹ Cf. A. Al-Azmeh, "Une question postmoderne," in *L'Identité*, ed. N. Tazi, Paris, 2004, pp. 11–24.
- ⁴² *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal al-Din "Al-Afghānī"*, trans. N. Keddie, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968. See also H. Pakdaman, *Djamal-Ed-Din Assad Abadi dit Afghānī*, Paris, 1969. On the great Indian Muslim reformist, see C. W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology*, New Delhi, 1978.
- ⁴³ See especially M. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966.
- ⁴⁴ See T. Parla, *The Social and Political Thought of Ziya Gökalp*, Leiden, 1986; and W. Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Thought of Satī al-Husri*, Princeton, 1971.
- ⁴⁵ For instance, L. Gumplowicz, *Geschichte der Staatstheorien*, Innsbruck, 1905, §59; and idem, "Un sociologue arabe du XIV^e siècle," in idem, *Aperçus Sociologiques* [1898], New York, 1963, pp. 201–6; F. Oppenheimer, *System der Soziologie*, vol. 2, 2nd ed., Stuttgart, 1964, pp. 173–4. See A. Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn in Modern Scholarship*, London, 1981, pp. 157 ff.
- ⁴⁶ J. al-Afghānī, *al-A'māl al-kāmila* [Complete Works], ed. M. 'Umāra, Cairo, n.d., pp. 434–4.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153. One might instructively refer to Hegel's pronouncements about the exit from history of Muslim nations: *Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree, New York, 1956, p. 360.
- ⁴⁸ H. Hanafi, *Dirāsāt falsafīyya* [Philosophical Studies], Cairo, 1988, pp. 52–7.
- ⁴⁹ W. Sharāra, *Hawl ba'd mushkilāt ad-dawla fi'l-fikr wa'l-mujtama' al-'arabiyyayn* [On some problems concerning the state in modern Arab thought and society], Beirut, 1981, p. 71.
- ⁵⁰ A. Laroui, *L'Idéologie arabe contemporaine*, Paris, 1967, p. 66.

- ⁵¹ *Al-A'māl al-majhūla* [Unknown Works], ed. 'A. Shalash, London, 1987, p. 81.
- ⁵² On this point, see A. Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation*, London, 1982, *passim*.
- ⁵³ An appreciation of the scope of and literature on medieval Arabic historical writing might be gained from L. Ammann, "Kommentiertes Literaturverzeichnis zu Zeitvorstellungen und geschichtlichem Denken in der islamischen Welt," *Die Welt des Islams* 37 (1997), pp. 28–87.
- ⁵⁴ See, for instance, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, ed. A. Lovejoy and G. Boas, Baltimore, 1935.
- ⁵⁵ Cf. M. Sahlin, *Culture and Practical Reason*, Chicago, 1976, pp. 52–3.
- ⁵⁶ J. Needham, "Time and Eastern Man," in idem, *The Grand Titration*, London, 1969, pp. 267–8.
- ⁵⁷ E. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, Oxford, 1963.
- ⁵⁸ C. Brémond, J. Le Goff, and J.-C. Schmitt, *L' "Exemplum"*, Turnhout (Belgium), 1982.
- ⁵⁹ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, p. 108.
- ⁶⁰ J. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Mileu. Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford, 1978, p. ix. The following paragraphs are taken from ch. 3. below.
- ⁶¹ K. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, Chicago, 1955, p. 181.
- ⁶² Y. Moubarac, *Abraham dans le Coran*, Paris, 1958; R. Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands. The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis*, Albany, 1990.
- ⁶³ For particularly salient accounts, see Tzvetan Todorov, *Symbolisme et interpretation*, Paris, 1978, pp. 100 ff.; and E. Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of Western literature*, Manchester, 1984, pp. 11–76.
- ⁶⁴ For this matter, see most particularly E. Auerbach, "Figura," *passim*.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- ⁶⁶ A. Al-Azmeh, "Utopia and Islamic Political Thought," in *Islams and Modernities*, ch. 6.

CHAPTER 2

Islam and the History of Civilizations

“entfernte Länder oder Weltteile ... welche die Ungunst
des Schicksals dem eigenen Anblick entzogen hat”

Hegel

It is appropriate to start by warning against the fascination of Islam in historical studies, and to suggest that interpretations of classical and contemporary Muslim political phenomena be undertaken in terms of their times and places rather than in terms of abiding cultural patterns. Fascination with the exotic, including the Muslim exotic, the distantly attractive or repellent, the self-enclosed and self-explanatory, ensnares the imagination and inhibits reason and the faculty of judgment; for fascination, sympathetic or hostile, is none other than beholding an object as if it were a marvel, and the spectacle of marvels suspends the normal operations of the human understanding. It is pertinent, moreover, to signal that the continuous reiteration of the familiar incantations about Difference, about Authenticity, cultural individuality and identity, and incommensurability, produces little but clichés, and that multiculturalist xenophilia, with its post-modern celebration of the pre-modernity of others, helps in the manufacture under contemporary conditions of imagined incommensurabilities, in which xenophilia and xenophobia mirror each other conceptually, and which indeed render xenophobia respectable—a xenophobia which, like xenophilia, anchors its pronouncements in a doctrine of cultural or civilizational intransitivity, a doctrine which, I maintain most strongly, is the late 20th century reclamation of earlier ideas of race. In both, an unjustified transposition is made of aesthetic and moral judgments into cognitive judgments.

I bring this up because I should like to preface what follows with reference to the terrible events unfolding since 11 September 2001, in order to signal the importance I give to the responsibility of all of us who are engaged in scientific research on the Middle East. I do not for a moment believe that we are witnessing the unfolding of a war of civilizations, although this apocalyptic scenario—and that of Dr. Strangelove—

is in wide circulation. I believe it is crucial that we do not dwell over-much on phantasms of historical individuality and of incommensurate identity, which have so far not only hardened exclusivist and exclusionary positions Muslim and non-Muslim, but which have produced little that can amount to much more than pandering to obscurantism in its various hues and colors, and produced scholarship which takes the aberrant for the normative. In this, fundamentalist and neo-orientalist discourses have most often come to mirror each other.

Above all, with regard to the ubiquitous talk of civilizations, we must put an end to considering a civilization as if it were a Platonic Idea, or to regard a civilization in an anthropomorphic manner, with a “personality” and with organic and homeostatic closure. Civilizations do not clash, nor do they, correlatively, enter into a dialogue. What do clash or enter into dialogue are more tangible entities that historical reason can disengage from the gelatinous “personality” imputed to civilizations: societies, states, armies, social groups, and economies in very specific times and places. It is important to realize, I believe, that knowledge of others does not arise from the multicultural etiquette for a dialogue of the deaf that is called the dialogue of civilizations, but from research that utilizes the normal equipment of the human and social sciences. It is equally important to realize that a name does not describe a civilization, and that a civilization is rather an historical process than a glacial presence. The events inaugurated by the attacks on New York are not a clash of civilizations, but a war against, among other things, a political sub-culture identified with Mr Ibn Laden, a caveman-Frankenstein and a perfectly rounded product of the Saudi public education system, set up by the US and her allies and abandoned to his own unreason. It is a war inside Muslim countries themselves: and I say Muslim countries without overdrawing the name of Islam to refer to Islamic civilization, which, clearly, no longer exists, having long ago become a bookish memory, like Greek and Roman civilizations, no matter how often the contrary is asserted.

In historical perspective, it is difficult to maintain that civilizations could be either properly and credibly named or sustained over time without empire: empires associated with their beginnings, and empires that saw them flourish over time. Most particularly before the era of modernity, no civilization could be perceived without the imperial correlation which gives it a name and infuses it with a specific and exclusive genealogical charter, enforced by the political, cultural, institutional and by the military armature of empire. Such was the case with the junction of Hellenism and Romanity, of Islam and the Arab empires,

of Mesopotamian civilization with the Achemenids. Given that civilizations might best be regarded as historiographical constructions in which scale, spatial as well as temporal, is paramount and a feature distinguishing them from mere cultures and societies, it is unsurprising that their conjunction with empire is crucial to their specification, and most particularly with empires that constitute the lynchpin of an ecumenical vocation.

Translatio imperii, for its part, is an historiographic motif of ecumenical imperial ambition put forth in terms of ecumenical succession, a motif whose origin is commonly associated with the Book of Daniel and later Apocalypses, but is by no means exclusive to them. The motif is sometimes deployed by merely appropriating a name, as was the case with putting forth Moscow as the Third Rome, or with the Carolingians who, together with other early medieval Europeans, had access to other forms of primeval association as well, expressed in the *origenes gentium* of Gregory of Tours or of the Venerable Bede for instance. But it is also a motif that does have concrete historical sense, which needs to be dug out below and above acts of naming, of arrogations of uniqueness, or of postures of grandiloquent continuity. For empires, and particularly ancient and Late Antique empires were translated one into the other, recuperating their heritage in continuity and only very rarely in breach with them, continuing their institutes, adopting or otherwise transforming their nominal genealogical charters.

I wish to assert that the emergence of Islam might most usefully be regarded as a *translatio* of previous empires and their associated civilizations, in a manner that might seem to some readers to be all the more counter-intuitive, as Islam implies to many generic ethnic, linguistic, and religious novelty. But before doing so, the indication of certain concepts and methods is in order. Studies of continuity and discontinuity implied by the notion *translatio* involve most emphatically the notion of comparison, even when concerned with an unreflected notion of generic continuity, such as ideological and political terms of current salience like the West, or Judeo-Christian civilization. Diachronic comparativism is crucial to all considerations of historical categorization and periodization, and in dealing with succession and translation, we are of course also dealing with a question of comparison.

Historical comparison has generally pursued two functions, the accentuation of distinctive features generally favored by historians on the one hand, and what might generally be described as the anthropological-historical, seeking to probe the limits of applicability of broad sociological concepts. The latter approach, which I favor, has a well-

known history starting with comparative linguistics, comparative religion, and anthropology. In this approach, generic unities of social morphology and of anthropological constants (elementary forms for Durkheim, mythology, or the savage mind for Lévi-Strauss) are sought. Alternatively, Weberian comparativism seeks to construct ideal types (such as civic corporatism) and constructs a comparativism at once of generality and of distinction, ultimately by negation and by the register of absences sometimes leading to exceptionalism, as was the case with Weber and Islam. All these take comparison for indicating specific instantiations of universal anthropological constants, or the removal from universality of some instances of historical becoming, most pointedly of Islam.

Civilization

Not unlike other terms used in the social and human sciences, the concept of civilization is inextricably entwined with the conditions of its emergence and the circumstances of its deployment. In speaking here of historical conditions of emergence and contexts of deployment of the term civilization there is no implied attitude of polemical and often mean-spirited cognitive nihilism which afflicts much of what proclaims itself to be post-colonial, and which conjures up an only scantily and emblematically apprehended Michel Foucault or Edward Said. Nor is this matter brought up in order to deny credence to the concept of civilization on the grounds that its emergence and its uses are tied to social and political interests—such a crude notion both of concept and of interest is far away from what is here suggested, not least because interest, even hostile interest, can decidedly produce knowledge and discovery, neither of which is diminished by the discovery that truth, like original sin, might indeed be motivated.

That the concept of civilization was formed under certain historical conditions, and that it has implied a variety of pragmatics of reception and of use, are matters of cognitive moment pertaining to its utilization in the historical sciences. This concept—like all others of use in historical discourse—has a history which reveals a number of historico-morphological features that render vain the attempt to use it unreflectively, and that simultaneously enrich its content and its contexts of deployment. That historiographic concepts like civilization are the products of history, that history has a history, is incontestable. But this need not imply except through hyper-sceptical and ultimately nihilistic excess that historical concepts are not, with the labor of Reason, *irreducible*

to history, and that it is in and through history that one seeks and hopes to find a principle of relative independence for cognition with respect to its very history.

The most notable element in the contexts of emergence of the notion of civilization was the rise of a specific type of historical consciousness in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as the subsequent globalization of this form of historical understanding and the forms of socio-political practice correlative with it.¹ The concept of civilization itself has generally been complex and imprecise in definition, but ubiquitous in its uses; it has been inextricably implicated with other categories by which historical materials are categorized and organized, most particularly those of culture, nation, race, and other terms designating large-scale historical masses, none of which lends itself usefully to uncritical use.² It is habitually used as the categorical medium within which is represented the continuity over time of human collectivities; and I will at the outset state the contention that I will try to sustain throughout, that civilization has most generally and rigorously been employed as a figure for continuity. Such a figure of continuity might be specific to a people or constellation of peoples, characterized by patterns of value called “culture” (as in romantic theories of history, particularly but by no means exclusively salient to German historical writing), or generally evolutionary and inclusively human (particularly relevant to France and to Marxism).

In the case of histories of Islam, the former prevails generally. Eisenstadt for one, a comparativist par excellence, states in the following thesis a view generally characteristic of treatments of Islam: “Only very few Muslim regimes—the Ayyubid, the Fātimid, to a smaller degree the Safavid, and above all the Ottoman—have indeed developed relatively strong imperial characteristics.” The surprising thing is not only the absence of the Umayyads, or of the Abbasids, but also that the polities listed are by no means “relatively few,” nor short-lived. Further to this elimination from the imperial register, the distinctive feature of the Islamic civilization that is said to inform these polities is identified as the “implementation of the basic premises of Islamic ideology.”³ What these “basic premises” might be, and whether “premises” might have the superhuman capacity to constitute empires and states by themselves, and whether in general *Weltanschauungslehre* or the theory of *Kulturkreise* might be able to account for history and historical structures of society, polity, economy, and culture rather than for contemporary ideology, is not a matter I can take up here, but is one which will be discussed from various angles in the course of this chapter.

Quite apart from designating certain morphological features of human society, such as urbanism or high literate culture, civilization has always been a grid of historical categorization, and of the expression and legitimation of spaces of social and political inclusion and exclusion, for the telescoping, indeed for the conjuration, of genealogies, of past trajectories, and of charters for the present. In this, civilizations have almost invariably been counterposed to savagery and barbarism, much as Greeks were and are still counterposed to the Barbarians, the *jat* Sanskritic communities of India counterposed to the Varvara, the Arabs counterposed to the 'Ajam, Islam and the West. Thus when we consider civilization in the light of critical historical reason, we must be mindful of the necessity of violating the spirit of innocence, ingenuous or disingenuous, with which a civilization pronounces its massive presence and its historical probability—the very same innocent spirit which in the tribalist idiom of fire-side wisdom suffusing much of our discussions on belonging, on shared values and virtues, on the intractability of Difference, on the “uniqueness of the West,” on the uniqueness of every collectivity of blood, color, or religion.

This poetics of history, a *Fortleben* of the epic, this organismic and vitalist notion of civilization with its motifs of rise, homeostasis, decadence, and decline, in which typology is taken for causality, was and still is extremely effective in the writing of history. It has in recent years taken on a renewed political salience sensationalised in Bernard Lewis' and later Samuel Huntington's pamphleteering on the “clash of civilizations,” no less than in its apparently benign mirror-image, the “dialogue of civilizations.” It denies the possibility of a general human history, which it regards, in the words of Ernst Troeltsch, as being a “violently monistic” notion, and construes the task of a history of civilizations as rigorously separate histories of Europe, China, India, Islam, Byzantium, Russia, Latin and Protestant Europe, and others, in various possible permutations and successions, each regarded as a separate cultural and moral sphere, whose contemporaneity is no more than sheer contiguity in space. Correlatively, this constituted and still constitutes the conceptual armature of certain forms of violently particularistic history that was mirrored or endogenously paralleled, among others in India for instance in the writings of Savarkar and their abiding influence on Hindu nationalism, in the writings of radical Muslim ideologues and their doubles like Huntington or Lewis, no less than in the politico-religious positions of Zionist ayatollahs and right-wing elements in Israel and beyond.

But civilization is not confined here to the writing of history. In

broadly anthropological terms, the notion can propose certain symbolic elements derived from the past as emblems of continuity and construe these as bearers of actual historical continuity with decided political salience, and this takes me to the figure of Siegfried. Thus when Claude Lévi-Strauss welcomed Georges Dumézil into the Académie Française in 1979,⁴ he praised what he regarded as Dumézil's prophetic gifts concerning the inevitable return of ancient bearers of continuity that Lévi-Strauss, not unlike Huntington, discerned in the Iranian revolution, a "return of the repressed" after centuries of abatement and abeyance—Lévi-Strauss' reference was to the new Academician's 1939 book on the myths and gods of the Germanic peoples, in which he had recognized that in terms of his famous tri-partite theory of Indo-European ideologies, the warrior function prevailed among the Germans over those of sovereignty and fecundity, which predominance he identified as the condition of possibility together of German militarism and German rebirth in the nineteenth century. Between the figures of Siegfried and Hitler, Dumézil recognized what he seems to have praised as "a sort of pre-established congruence between past and present," rather than merely an imitation of the past; he recognized an element of supra and infra-historical continuity next to which Nazi propaganda was negligible in its mobilizing effect.

Genealogical telescoping, a feature of traditionalism universally, is here clearly of greater ontological weight than that of history. What we have here is clearly an anthropomorphic notion of the history of a civilization, which likens it to an organism, and is therefore a natural history of civilization set in a social-Darwinist world rather than a human or cultural history. I would much prefer the view of Simmel, who defined culture as the cultivation of objects "beyond the performance of their natural constitution," and his definition of a cultural process as the "supra-natural growth of the energies of things," reflecting the growth of energies that are properly human.⁵

It is particularly grievous that such unreflected ideas of supra-historical continuity are still so much in circulation in the highest rungs of the academic world, when it has in the past half-century become possible historically to specify the material elements that constitute the history of a civilization, however its temporal and geographical boundaries may be defined—and I must stress that work on periodisation and the categorization of civilizations and the setting of their boundaries and mutual interferences, is a prime task in the history of civilizations which is still virtually virgin territory. Above all, in order for the nominal categorisation of broad historical phenomena as Islamic, Hellenis-

tic, or Western, to have any serious historical credibility, it needs to be shorn of the exclusivist genealogical registers which infirm each of these categories in an incommensurable individuality. Conceiving civilizations and geo-historical boundaries in terms of autarchy on the presumption of internal homogeneity, is as commonplace as it is deceptive. Collective historical “memory” is no substitute for the history of this memory, for investigating its conditions of possibility, or for the salience to it of questions of scale which are often ignored when to “the West” or “Islam” is imputed the internal coherence of a small-scale community imagined by a *volkisch* disposition. A nominal historical category called civilization needs, rather, to be presented as a sort of “système hypersocial de systèmes sociaux” (M. Mauss).⁶

Correlatively, it has now become possible to conceive the specific differences between histories—China and Europe for instance, as in the work of Jacques Gernet—beyond a discourse on immobility and other immanent characteristics ascribed to this history or that, and to think of specificity in proper historical terms, such as the relative weight of various elements of the rural economy, the relation between state and the economy, the impact of metallurgy, and much else.

By the same token, it has become possible squarely to face the nominalist caution required in thinking about civilizations, and to think of their constitution, specification, and collapse in terms of the concrete historical investigation of demography, economy, and society without recourse to the metaphysical rhetoric of decline. No longer is it credible seriously to write a history of incommensurable names—Romanity or Islam, for instance—nor is it creditable to countenance the attribution of hyper-coherence to a civilizational system except in very restricted contexts: hyper-coherence, after all, does not allow us to consider historical continuities and mutations; such a form of coherence does not allow for a level of complexity commensurate with that of a civilization, and does not admit of the possibility of mutation, for if the institutions of a civilization are so completely integrated, the only form of change they will admit is that of catastrophic systemic collapse, as recent studies have shown from a systems-theoretical perspective.⁷

Nevertheless, recent historical research has made it possible for those of us who are interested concretely to tap the genial formulations made by Marcel Mauss in 1930 concerning the categorization of large-scale historical masses: of civilizations as a “hyper-social systems of social systems,” as trans-societal and extra-national units of historical perception and categorization. Civilizations are thus conceived in distinction and often in opposition to specific social phenomena *inside*

each civilization, whatever its spatial, temporal and other parameters. This conception of civilization valorizes the distinction between civilization, society, and culture, freeing the first from the deterministic and totalizing rhetorical glosses of metahistory, and making a veritable history of civilizations possible. Civilization may thus be considered as at once a particular instance of historical becoming, and a specific ideological redaction of continuity and intransitivity whose relation to historical reality can be questioned and rendered historical. And finally, given the crucial salience of my accent on complexity, one might be able to take the precise and nuanced study of levels and modes of socio-economic, political, institutional, ideational, and other instances of complexity—rather than criteria of simple continuity—as crucial to the delimitation of historical phenomena that one designates as “civilizations.”

Islam preconceived

Moving on to the more concrete level of Islam and the history of civilizations, a conference was held in Bordeaux in 1956, of the most prominent orientalist of the day specializing in matters Islamic, whose proceedings were published under the title *Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l'histoire de l'Islam*.⁸ Revisiting this event would help in sustaining the notion that Islam and its histories might best—and contrary to the spirit of this publication—be regarded as one regards any other history, not least because of the extraordinary receptivity of public opinion, including most eminently academic opinion West and East, to exorbitantly exceptionalist, totalizing, and mystifying notions of social and historical collectivities, most particularly with regard to Islam.

In order to do this, one would need to disaggregate a presumed historical totality called Islam, to which are commonly ascribed a more or less clear-cut beginning, a stupendously massive internal coherence, no less than a glacial coherence over time, all of which makes its history a most *singular* and incommensurable history, a history that cannot be described, as histories normally would or should, in terms of significant change over time and territory, of variation and profoundly consequent differentiation in terms of culture, class, modes of piety, intellectual commitment, and much else. Such an ascription of coherence, singularity, and exceptionalism, leaving no room for history, makes it imperative that this history—this succession of events and structures over time—be scrutinized and consequently described according to the fire-side *topos* of history as the story rise and decline.

In other words, what is at issue is the categorization of historical objects (of economies, polities, cities, histories) as Islamic. This perspective would allow the covery of various ways in which histories and civilizations are defined, and the manner in which the doctrine of historicism has been articulated with studies of Muslim history. This would also allow one to embark upon the consideration, by way of illustration, of a specific period in the history of Muslims, that relating to the rise of the Muslim religion and its correlative empire in their historical context, and the name of this context is Late Antiquity.

Bordeaux in 1956 is a good vantage point from which to start this enquiry. The proceedings were marked almost entirely by an unreflected and rather crude notion of decline and decadence, a situation that is altogether common in studies that take as their units of references large-scale historical masses called civilizations or cultures. Civilizations are here regarded, in the historist mode of historical understanding, to be almost primary given facts, almost intuitive categories of historical apprehension, in no need for definition except for the secondary degree of definition by distinction.⁹ In this perspective, their study entails simple characterization and the instantiation of representative types or “patterns” identified by the features imputed to moments construed as classical and *ipso facto* foundational. In this metahistorical taxonomy, the histories of these historical masses thus appear to be either merely preparatory for the achievement of classical form, or else histories of heteronomous influence and ultimately of decline. Historical becoming is here the temporal continuum of a totalizing essence, and whatever does not fit into the register of continuity is regarded as either a “survival” or an “influence” which cannot, in the manner of history as it actually occurs, sully the purity of the classical form.

This is of course a form of organizing historical materials which is fairly standard, and is of very considerable ideological density. It generally conceives of historical masses as *Kulturkreise* or cultural spheres, summed up in an ethos or a set of “patterns” or constitutive values. It is generally describable by general nominative *titles* (such as Islam or the West), which constitute the primary object of study. These emblematic titles usually take the form of markers of their referents, such as an aesthetic spirit, a Promethean or Faustian spirit, a religious view of life, a democratic spirit, and a variety of other markers which in fact neither properly describe nor comprehend the complexity and historicity of a civilization, but rather assume a “sociologie inconsciente qui encombre l’histoire vulgaire.”¹⁰ The accent is placed either on abiding characteristics or on the privations of and distances from such charac-

teristics—for example, Periclean Athens, Republican Rome, or the earliest Arab Caliphate. In this chronophagous discourse, the integrity over time of these entities is construed metaphorically, according to a biological and vitalist metaphor.

Such is the structure of historical understanding in terms of which studies and discussions of large historical masses generally takes place. But the fact is that it is very difficult to sustain such a view of vast temporal continuities beyond producing a history of names: Latinity, Hellenism, and Islam, among others. Even historians of exceptional discernment like Fernand Braudel, who deployed an orchestral¹¹ rather than lateral notion of time, and for whom the direction of historical events is constituted by convergences rather than by forms of essential predetermination, can have no alternative but have recourse to citing this telling anecdote or that to sustain theorizing the integrity and continuity over vast ranges of space and time of Protestant and Catholic Europe for instance, and to organize his discourse in terms of cognitively empty yet politically dangerous notions such as “destiny.” The writing of history in terms of trans-historical nominatives, like Islam or Hellenism, or of the West from Athens on to downtown Los Angeles after a transit in Aachen-Aix-la-Chapelle, on the Mont St. Geneviève, and in Wittenberg, inevitably becomes a history of repetition and re-enactment, that is to say, a rhetoric of types and figures.

Concomitant with this rhetoric of types and figures is the fact that the histories of contemporary and adjacent historical masses, such as Greece and Persia or the West and Islam, are written as a history of normative contrasts, each with its own repetition of normative origins and classical moments. Such vitalist thinking about history regards units of historical study as singular wholes separately enfolded upon themselves over the vast space of historical phenomena, political, religious, cultural, and social, as well as over time. Origins are explained by their outcomes, and historical becoming is not regarded as something which radically transforms, but as something which weakens, on an almost thermodynamic model of entropy, the essential mainsprings of the historical unit under consideration, a unit which is itself regarded as a project intentionally conceived, or visibly articulated—in the case of Islam, by the Koran, for instance, or by the project of the shar’ist organization of the world.¹²

It is thus unsurprising that the eminent orientalist scholars gathered in Bordeaux greeted with such sniffy horror the attempt to introduce into the discussion refinements, and even fundamental questions, about the notion of decline, from the representative of another, more advanced

field of historical studies. When Henri-Irené Marrou, clearly not wishing to offer these distinguished gentlemen an alibi in a cliché of Roman history, tried to warn against the unduly ingenuous notion of the decadence of Rome;¹³ when he tried to communicate the facts that history rarely knows definitive and final termini, that the unreflected notion of decline rests on a naive notion of civilization, that these were questions to be ascertained by historical research and not assumed *a priori*, that historical becoming is interminable and, most saliently, that alterity and change over time do not necessarily imply decline;¹⁴ when Marrou conveyed these basic clarifications to his audience, he was seized upon with a vehemence that was then altogether uncommon in the academic trade. But this accorded well with the counter-prophetic take on history with which the gentlemen assembled in Bordeaux sought to make another, finer historical discipline complicit, and displayed a resistance to the historiographic consequences of precise historical knowledge which had been often characteristic of orientalist history writing. Marrou's critics asserted, without very much ado, that the category of decline was somehow self-evident, clearly bringing into their statements vague memories retained from school textbooks or popular articles treating Roman history in years past.¹⁵

It is interesting to try and account for this bizarre confrontation at Bordeaux in the light of the manifest need to give the notion of decline such an unassailable position in the particular scheme of things within which Muslims necessarily need to degenerate into decadence rather than to change over time. The key to this suggests itself readily as the presumption of the organic, homeostatic unity and of the generic integrity of things Islamic, sealed at the beginning. This made it possible for them to propose, against all evidence, that science, philosophy, culture, religion, law, mysticism, and much else declined together, and in almost perfect formation, from the ninth century. Decline takes on a rather tawdry appearance, almost that of a malediction.¹⁶ Muslim civilization assumes the character of a colossal historical misadventure, one which was inevitably to misfire, due to a fundamental unviability and a foundational brevity, what Sir Hamilton Gibb loftily called "a kernel of derangement [in] Muslim society,"¹⁷ playing its allotted life as a pathetic psychodrama, indeed as a caricature in the mode of the grotesque, with predetermined roles as ill-conceived for the world we know as it was for its actors, and with pre-determined outcomes integrally accomplished, without disturbance.

What I do wish to underline is the subjacent and constitutive notion of the integrity of a civilization which I have discussed briefly. For it is

only in the light of such a conception that it is possible to conceive historical decline as a fall from the grace of a normative condition, with fast origins determining the fundamental impulse of a civilization and its course over time. I will not dignify the narrative of this course over time with the name of history, for in it a conflation is made between the metaphor of organic decline, and the referents indicated by it,¹⁸ and it quite simply sublimates parochial musings and political categories into an historical metaphysics.

Muslim civilization and the passages over time with which the elements attributed to it were involved are, in this context, specified in terms of absences, and in the recent past, in terms of absolute albeit generally unspecified difference from what is termed Judaeo-Christian civilization. This notion of a Judaeo-Christian historical continuum has a certain fundamentalist resonance issuing from Biblical typology which was actuated in all sorts of locations: describing Noah's Arc as a prefiguration of the Church, describing Crusaders or eighth-century Franks or some contemporary U.S. Evangelists as the truly Elect Israelites, conceiving the medieval monarch as *typus Christi*—these are continuities which had little salience in modern times outside the concerns of Biblical exegesis and of fundamentalist Protestant groups. It was only after the Second World War and especially after 2001 that the typological construction of a Judaeo-Christian heritage acquired a renewed aptitude and vigor, and this is primarily a political fact, which is habitually allowed to cloud historical vision.

This particular nomenclature apart, what I wish to emphasize is that an itinerary of Muslim decline, self-enclosed in essence, endogenous, and inevitable, figures as a paradoxical double to another civilization that has been rising and rising from the dawn of Western history, often regarded as having started in Ionia on the western and south-western shores of Anatolia. And serious historians, when they do not choose to suspend historical judgment in matters relating to Islam, of course can have no truck with fictions of this kind. Fernand Braudel, for one, in a textbook designed for secondary-school pupils, warned against confusing decline and decadence with the loss of supremacy in speaking of Muslim histories (a common ideological conflation of explanatory registers which, among others, Ranke willfully made¹⁹), and in the same breath rejected the notion that Islam and its institutions were born *ex nihilo* and virtually complete²⁰ in a singular moment of time in the seventh century.

Yet prescient warnings of this kind do not seem to sully the determination with which the standard narrative and motifemic patterns of

writing Islamic history are put forth. Briefly stated, Islam is commonly seen to have arisen out of a marginal bibliocentric religion, which exploded upon the vista of world history as a force of conquest, foisting a novel faith and a Levitical “way of life,” with its *sui-generis* system of belief, practice, legal organization, social structure, political form, and so forth, all of which correspond to one another,²¹ and therefore declined in perfect formation as matters emerged in Bordeaux in 1956. The sense of self-enclosure, of the generic singularity normally attributed to civilizations, is rigorously applied here. In some instances, this irruption onto the vista of a world history was seen as having been subtended by the Arab sense of nationality (for instance, Ranke²²), or a predilection for plunder (as for instance Burckhardt²³), or indeed the combination of both in rather a desperate recent synthesis by a contemporary scholar: according to what its expert author calls “the nativist model,” this spirited invective reads as follows: “...holy war was not a cover for material interests, ... it was a proclamation of them ... Muhammad’s God ... elevated tribal militance and rapaciousness into supreme religious virtues.” The consequence is that the answer given desperately begs the question: “Muhammad had to conquer, his followers liked to conquer, and his deity told him to conquer; do we need any more?”²⁴—indeed what more, but to deliver historical scholarship to the very “sociologie inconsciente qui encombre l’histoire vulgaire” mentioned earlier. It is unsurprising that, in this perspective, that which is not so reducible to the original impulse, however described, is adjudged exogenous, heteronomous, the “influence” of previous times and other worlds on the primal flower of singularity. Yet the world being as it is, this psychodrama scripted by origins onto the surface of time was soon played out, and “Islam” started, very early on, on the road to rapid and irrevocable decline—until today, when a “crisis of identity” is exemplified by what is portrayed as an essential incompatibility between authentic culture in reassertion, and forces of “Westernization.”

Let us start with the succinct account of Herder in the eighteenth century, the constitutive elements of which are, I fear, still with us; and most particularly with Herder’s wonderful irony concerning what he termed “the Caliph’s syllogism”:²⁵ the Caliph’s syllogism refers to the commonly-held fiction illustrating the Arab predilection to cultural vandalism, namely the legend of the Caliph Umar’s order to have the library of Alexandria put to the torch. This was a predilection to vandalism born not of barbaric malevolence, but, according to Herder—the similarity with present-day multiculturalists is evident—of a noble

innocence and a pious simplicity: a romantic primitivism not uncommon during the Enlightenment, one equally expressed in Voltaire's admiration for the chivalric ethos of the early Arab conquerors. It is this which holds the key to the Caliph's syllogism, namely, that if the library's contents were a repository of truth, they are rendered superfluous by the sufficiency of the Koran, and if they were in contradiction with the truth, there can be no room for them.

Herder imputed to Muslim history a simplicity and clarity of course which led from beginnings at once definite and definitive; for the Koran and the fiery enthusiasm and voluntarism it engendered was so out of keeping with the world that it led to a speedy decline inherent in its nature and arising from its origin and constitution. Now Herder was well aware of the existence of the Umayyads, the Abbasids, the Fātimids, and the Ottomans who knocked loudly at the gates of Vienna not long before his own lifetime and nearly a thousand years after the initial enthusiasm was deemed by him to have been spent. But this is all irrelevant, for Herder was constrained by the schema that construed the history of Muslim dynasties as one of degeneracy, effeminacy, voluptuousness, and despotism, all dependent on the simple dogma of submission to the one deity.²⁶

Muslims have a simple history describable entirely in terms of an initial spurt of energy which could not withstand the pressures of reality, and ultimately had to devolve to what Hegel, in a structurally similar albeit rather more complex treatment, termed "Oriental ease and repose [*Gemächlichkeit und Ruhe*]"²⁷: for him, Mohammedanism was a negative affirmation of divine unity, an empty wager. The result of the Muslim conception was that energy in the secular world could only be deployed to a negative, albeit occasionally heroic and magnanimous purpose. This is a trope taken up in the last two decades by quite a literature on the disconnection between Muslim state and society, emblematically expressed in the thesis of rule by slaves in the later Middle Ages, foreigners in the 19th century, and cultural or sectarian minorities since the Second World War.

The broad conceptions adopted by later historians took place under positivist influence, exemplified by the ambiguous and not very profound motto of the great Ranke, of presenting history "*wie es eigentlich gewesen.*" For indeed, the immanentist and vitalist position espoused by Herder, resulting ultimately in historicism, and the historicism of Hegel, both had considerable salience for conceptualizing the histories of Islam in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The general Hegelian scheme of universal genetic-historical interconnec-

tion persisted despite the turn towards romantic nationalist notions of historical individuality, professionalized by Ranke, and it persisted most specifically in the construal of Oriental histories, most pungently of Muslim histories, in terms of generic contrasts. If we look elsewhere in the nineteenth century, we see similar judgments expressed by an exacting philologist and historian, Ernest Renan, who saw the history of the Semitic race to be one recognizable exclusively through negative characteristics, a list of absences: of public spirit, of internal organization and complexity, of civic life, of political and juridical institutions, no less than the absence of philosophy and myth. All of these are attributable, according to him, to the original simplicity of Semitic-Muslim notions of divine unity,²⁸ implicitly and explicitly contrasted to the rich substantiality of the Christian notion of divinity.²⁹ Inevitably, Renan construed the histories of Muslims as having been fully-formed at birth, frozen in an infantile stage, incapable of development, formed in one instant for all eternity,³⁰ what Jakob Burckhardt had characterized as an arid and frightfully brief moment of foundation.³¹

If in the historicist perspective history be that of individual entities, indeed of singularities, conceived after the metaphor of the organism, the history of each can be none other than the genetic development of the constituent elements pre-existing in this organism. In the case of Islam, this process was, despite certain aspects of noble romance, as nasty and brutish as it was short. For the rest, the consequences of decline and decadence were manifest; time is here regarded not the agency of change and the substratum of becoming, but rather of degeneration; hence the broad consensus referred to by Renan concerning the monotony of Muslim history, the repetition within it of the same passions.³² Time thus becomes a space of comparative classification;³³ it becomes not a measure of movement but a quality of states.³⁴ The constitutive principle of that other, Muslim history, which is measured against another, normative and far more accomplished Western, Romano-Germanic history, containing the list of positive qualities, is the bundle of its predispositions, such as the Koran; these constitutive principles take on a spermiatic quality of prodigious amplitude, filling up time in its entirety. This history, in brief, is a typological history, a pseudo-causal history of prefigurations and realizations, a genealogy of invariance: the notion of time as repetition, intimately connected to social and textual ritualism, is something familiar in the history of religions and in the interpretations of the Bible and of the Koran, and its salience to historical writing, historical explanation, and the idle search of origins, is vastly underestimated. The monotony of Muslim history of

which Renan and others spoke, the open-ended story of decline as a continuum of indistinctness, are but excesses of typological repetition masquerading as historical causality.

This is why the histories of Muslims are almost invariably written in terms of an itinerary of uniform impulses that pre-exist almost entirely in their foundational text, an itinerary which is seen to be almost invariably humbling. The assumption most often made here is that religion is to be described primarily as a set of sentiments and dogmas—a phenomenological position largely consonant with the self-referential theories of religion produced in Protestant milieus with a pietistic bent. Great historical enterprises are indeed often humbled, and humbled handsomely; but great historical enterprises cannot adequately be conceived as voluntarist, and their humbling should be described rather in terms of historical forces, without psychodramatic pathos. Yet the histories of this decline, the endogenetic work of original projects typologically predetermined, the presumption of coherence and integrity over time, are not always described with the lofty peremptoriness of a Gibb, for instance, who interpreted Muslim history in terms of this very humbling of original, Ur-Islamic, religious institutions and institutes (the *ʿulamā* and the *sharīʿa*)—these, by his admission and in a manner reminiscent of what has been already said about Herder, only started to crystallize in the eleventh and twelfth centuries³⁵—Gibb's history, in other words, is one which starts long after it is supposed to have been terminated.

* * *

This same deliberate will to the denial of history proper is absent from more thoughtful work, such as that of Marshall Hodgson. Yet even here, we are presented with an almost predestinarian history of the complex emergence of what he termed *sharīʿa*-mindedness, to be accounted for by a history written in counterpoint to the history of the West which, he believed, was less totally structured by religious representations, even in the Middle Ages.³⁶ He took this contrastive history further, by tabulating respective traits or cultural patterns, denuded of history and circuitously derived from Weber, traits—some of them fictional—which he thought uniform, constitutive, and trans-historically effective, such as Islamic contractualism vs. Western corporatism and communal moralism vs. corporative formalism. And while he admitted that norms of social organization cannot be directly derived from religion, he re-introduced this causality of the world stood upon its head in the case of Islam, by rhetorical appeal to the notion of “direct co-ordina-

tion” between the two.³⁷ Not surprisingly, this “direct co-ordination” corresponds to the presumption of full internal coherence current in historicist and more generally culturalist accounts of Muslim histories, where religion, urban structures, social norms, and all aspects of life are isomorphous and reproduce each other mutually, starting from the same impulse, and degenerating in synchronous rhythm.

It therefore appears that Hodgson’s insertion of Islamic civilization within the same ultimate genealogy as that of the Occident—urban commercial traditions, classical Greek philosophy and science, and so forth—and his reference to it as a “sister civilization”³⁸ is rather gratuitous and largely rhetorical, it being the noble sentiment of a well-meaning and erudite historian set, however, in the inhospitable milieu of culturalist contrastive histories. In this milieu, such humanitarian historical generosity with regard to common origins remains without effect, for the accent is here placed on a no less original distinctiveness, which led to divergence and which *ab initio* overrode this universal sorority of individual and singular histories related in contrast.

But this was not in the same way the case with conceptions of Muslim particularity both broader in historical scale and sharper in their definition and in their sense of reality, and I would here mention the conceptions of Carl Heinrich Becker and of Arnold Toynbee.

Both Becker and Toynbee saw the Muslim empires as an antistrophic response—the expression is Toynbee’s—to Occidental advances in the East, most pertinently to Alexander’s conquests and their aftermath, as successors to the Achamaenean Persians.³⁹ This was by no means a novel idea: the same antithetical conception had been available, but used almost exclusively in terms of a contrastive history of East and West. Hegel among many others had seen the wars of Persia and Greece as wars between essences that transcend time and space, concretely expressed in a war between principles Eastern and Western. Correlatively, he saw the wars between Rome and Carthage within the same register. In a further extension, Ranke regarded the wars in the eleventh century between the Normans of Sicily, sentinels of the Germanic spirit, and the Zirids of Tunisia, to be in direct continuity with the Punic wars of Rome.⁴⁰ Clearly, this antithetical history holds sequence in time to be a mere instance of a spatial classification, of East and West, subtending a classification of intransitive cultural essences. Temporal sequence thus becomes the irregular rhythm of typological repetition, instantiation, and re-enactment, what Spengler called “meaningless proportions,” in which the former and latter occurrence are figures of a typological movement and a typological contrast. History becomes

thus an essentially classificatory rather than explanatory discourse, and its figures allegories of master concepts that move both in time and in space: typology is, after all, an allegory in the medium of time.

But it is not to be doubted that the Persian wars and the Alexandrian conquests had a world-historical amplitude. Becker wrote: "ohne Alexander den Grossen keine Islamische Zivilization."⁴¹ He saw the rise of Islamic civilization as a response to the Westernization of the Orient after cultural miscegenation under the Seleucids, a process which was also evident, in his opinion, in the Orientalization and the Slavisation of Byzantium.⁴² The earlier migrations of the Arabs out of the Peninsula and, in the seventh century, the explosive conquests of the Arab "nomads," were merely the precipitating factors of a long-term process. Following the theories of Leone Caetani (after Winckler) about the ecological determinants of the Arab conquests, and the conventional contention that these were also a "nationalist" response whose earlier forms had been the eastern Monophysite heresies, a reaction of the Near East against its "Westernization"⁴³—he saw the Arab conquests as the response of the Aramean East, or what Toynbee termed the Syriac civilization, to its cultural subjection by Hellenism, which had rendered it what Spengler would have described as a Pseudomorph.⁴⁴

Historism being a vitalist doctrine of pure types, Greek and Persian, eastern and Western, pseudo-morphosis is not something that could be considered as having an abiding effect. Cultural mixture appears in this perspective as a disnature which cannot abide or have consequential effects except such as would be destructive to the original model. Naturalistic historism and its organismic vocabulary requires that purity—of race or of civilization—must reassert itself. Toynbee expressed this very clearly,⁴⁵ making copious use of immanentist, vitalist, anthropomorphic, and historically animist vocabularies: "We may express the historical function of the Abbasid Caliphate by describing it as a "reintegration" or "resumption" of the Achaemenian Empire—the reintegration of a political structure which had been broken up by the impact of an external force, and the resumption of a phase of social life which had been interrupted by an alien intrusion." Further: "Is it fantastic," he asked, "to conceive the possibility of such a relation between two institutions which were separated in time by an interval of more than a millennium? If this seems fantastic at first sight, we may reflect that an interval which measured thirty-six generations of human lives was wholly occupied by a single historical event: the collision between Hellenic Society and that other society ... which manifested itself ... alike in the Achamaenean Empire before the collision

and in the `Abbasid Caliphate after it. We must also allow for the fact that in this collision the non-Hellenic Society was the victim. This society's career was suddenly and violently interrupted by the intrusion of an alien force; and such an abnormal interference with the course of life might be expected to produce an abnormal reaction in the shape of a paralysis lasting as long as the intrusion itself. As soon, however, as the alien intruder was expelled, we should expect the victim to reassume the posture out of which he had been shaken by the original impact and to resume the career which the intrusion had arrested ... This is surely less fantastic than to dismiss as fortuitous coincidences the remarkable resemblances between the two universal states which stand in this particular historical relation to one another."

This is clearly a typological history of purity and repetition if there ever was any. But I do agree, and agree strongly, with this vision of a *très longue durée* in the history of Late Antiquity. There is a definite sense in which this massive continuity, expressed in a millennium of almost continuous warfare attempting to bring the ancient ecumene under unitary imperial control, can be fruitfully understood and worked with, in order historically to understand the histories of Islam. Alexander was indeed a Macedonian by origin. But it would be far more fruitful, and historically more accurate, to describe him, not as having appended Iran to Greece, but as having been the last sovereign of the Achamaenian state who, like many other ancient and late antique rulers of universal states, conquered his way to power starting from faraway barbarian and semi-barbarian lands. Alexander appended Greece to Iran rather, and legitimately succeeded to the Achamaenian throne. He subjugated his native Macedonia with characteristic brutality, married into the Achamaenean royal family, and pursued Achamaenean claims in the Punjab and the Hindu Kush, much as he had wished to press similar claims in the Arabian Peninsula, interrupted by his early death.

That Islam was implicit in Late Antiquity⁴⁶ is the result, not of some antistrophic response to an Occidental challenge and a heteronomous threat, but arises from a situation where the classification between matters Oriental and Occidental is irrelevant. Recent work has shown how profoundly Hellenized Syria, for instance, was in Late Antiquity. But we should not be content with begging the question: by Hellenism is not meant a heteronomous disnaturation of things naturally Syrian, Semitic, or Near Eastern, but a certain concatenation of religious representations and intellectual currents in a linguistic medium and in terms of an universalist paganism which ultimately developed into Byzantine and later Muslim oecumenism. Yet this Hellenism was not

of necessity Greek in origin, and it must be stressed, incidentally and exemplarily, that the tribal democracy of Athens should not be seen in the light of nineteenth-century representations of medieval corporatism or of representative rule, but rather compared with anthropologically more proximate situations, such as the *boulê* Palmyra or the *mala'* of pre-Islamic Mecca. Moreover, Greek and late antique political theory from Plato and Macedonian court at Pella on to Hellenistic and Roman political representations—this included the divinization of Roman emperors, and not only Oriental and semi-Oriental emperors like Caracalla or Philip the Arab, but the most patrician of patricians, like Julius, Augustus, and Claudius, whose families were descended from Venus and Romulus—most often adopted Persian political norms of kingship as exemplary, just as fifth century B.C. Athenian aristocrats adopted and adapted Persian dress and manners with alacrity, as a mark of social distinction and of aspirations to an imperial status. Similarly, the Orientalism of the growing Roman Empire is not so much a degeneration of republicanism as much as a move towards de-provincialization, to imperial maturation, to an oecumenism of greater historical sweep and extension than what Latinity could offer, culminating in the displacement of the imperial Roman capital eastwards. It might be noted that with the exception of Plato, Proclus, and a small number of others, Greek philosophy—especially neo-Platonism and the all-important currents which coalesced under the name of Stoicism—was not the work of figures that might be termed Westerners: Aristotle was a Macedonian semi-Barbarian by origin, the Ionian philosophers were Anatolians. Iamblichus came from Apamea, Plotinus was Alexandrian, Porphyry a Tyrean whose name was Malik, the architect of Trajan's Roman forum was one Apollodorus of Damascus. The Anatolian Galen was patronized by the empress Julia Domna, daughter of the chief priest of Ba'l in Hims (Emessa to the Romans), wife of Septimius Severus, at her court in Antioch. Longinus belonged to Zenobia's court at Palmyra.

Let me again insist on not begging the question of labels: I am not subscribing to the theory that Late Antique world was Oriental or Orientalized, as is often stated, and I am not in the business of constructing an Orientalism in reverse. What I am claiming is that the categories of Orient and Occident are without cognitive salience and of little historical value. Islam was implicit in Late Antiquity in the sense that over the course of many centuries there were profound tendencies towards oecumenical unity represented by the constant to-ing and fro-ing, by the continual attempts by eastern states to expand towards the

West and for states located on the northern shores of the Mediterranean to move east. Islam consummated Late Antiquity by bringing together most of these territories and garnering long-term economic, monetary, imperial, religious, and cultural trends towards a civilizational unity, while the Barbarian fringes to the north and north-west of Europe were left to gestate and turn tribalism into corporatism and feudalism. The Muslim world between the eighth and eleventh centuries, according to Maurice Lombard, was truly a point of arrival rather than of departure: a vast economic territory under the signature of an extraordinarily stable gold currency, and a vast area with various levels of cultural and institutional synthesis, realizing very long trends and organizing them under unified imperial aegis, then gradually shifting their terms of symbolic and genealogical reference from the universal to the specifically Muslim, expressed by the new oecumenical language, Arabic.

If we are to talk here of civilization we must, here as elsewhere, be reminded of Mauss' genial and very rich definition: a civilization is "un système hypersocial des systèmes sociaux."⁴⁷ The "hyper" quality is extremely suggestive. It takes us, among other places, to various imaginaries of the social and the historical, to the realm of representation, to the sanitation of social memory by telescoping and displacement: to the social, cognitive, and semiotic conditions, in other words, for claims and for the social and political enforcement of claims to genealogical closure and to generic civilizational maidenhood. It takes us, in short, to elaborating notions of tradition. Collective historical "memory" is no substitute for the history of this memory and for the study for its conditions of possibility. Such are the conceptual desiderata for thinking about civilizations historically: not to sound a totalizing temper, but to question it, and to construct it as an object of historical research and scrutiny.

* * *

Little systematic and detailed work on continuities and discontinuities between Islam and late Antiquity has been done, but the material is gathering force and is about to achieve a critical mass. The historical study of Late Antiquity itself, unfashionable until recently, has reached an extraordinary level of richness and nuance. There is outstanding work on material, institutional, religious, and economic organization, based on patient study of literary sources in the relevant languages, no less than the study of epigraphy, numismatics, and pottery.⁴⁸ There is much detailed work on economics,⁴⁹ on art history,⁵⁰ urbanism,⁵¹ intellectual history, religious representations,⁵² and political represen-

tations,⁵³ and a synthesis is timely—chapter 9 of this book suggests the historical lineaments of one such possible synthetic investigation. Such a synthesis which could allow us to gauge historical breaks, and specify them with the twelfth century, with a vast Late Antique expanse lasting from ca. 300 to ca. 1000. But the assumption must always be that historical masses have no real as distinct from constructed, genealogical loyalties to origin and that integrity and unsullied historical virtue is a charade which is nevertheless constitutive of all traditions. Undertaking research relative to historical categorization and periodization must rely on resisting the temptation to conjure things up simply by naming them. There is indeed much to a name, but also very little that is beyond question, and it is with questioning the characterization of the history of Muslims as Islamic history and of Late Antiquity as Western that we must begin. It was centuries after Muhammad that Islamic civilization became distinctive, having decanted the heritage of previous oecumenical histories. Only so might we be able to compare like with like, rather than contrasting incommensurables: by delivering them both to history.

Notes

- ¹ One might usefully consult, for instance, J. Moras, *Ursprung und Entwicklung des Begriffs der Zivilisation in Frankreich (1756–1830)*, Hamburg, 1930; and D. Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*, Edinburgh, 1957.
- ² A lucid account of difficulties attendant upon one such notion is given by Fehrbach, “Reich,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 5, ed. R. Koselleck et al., Stuttgart, 1957 ff., pp. 423–4 and *passim*.
- ³ S. N. Eisenstadt, “Weber’s Analysis of Islam and the Specific Pattern of Islamic Civilization,” in *Max Weber and Islam*, ed. Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schluchter, New Brunswick and London, 1999, pp. 283–4.
- ⁴ C. Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, tr. John and Anne C. Tedeschi, Baltimore, 1992, pp. 126 ff. It is worthy of a note that Dumézil has repudiated pro-Nazi charges made against him in this connection, first implied by Arnaldo Momigliano (“Georges Dumézil and the Trifunctional Approach to Roman Civilization,” *History and Theory* 23/3 [1984], pp. 312–30 and 312 ff.; and developed by C. Ginzburg, “Mythologie germanique et nazisme, sur un ancien livre de Georges Dumézil,” *Annales ESC* 4 [1985], pp. 695–715) – see G. Dumézil, “Science et politique. Réponse à Carlo Ginzburg,” in *Annales ESC* 5 (1985) pp. 985–9.
- ⁵ G. Simmel, *Simmel on Culture*, ed. D. Frisby and M. Featherstone, London, 1997, p. 38.
- ⁶ L. Febvre, E. Tonnelat, M. Mauss, and A. Niceforo, *Civilization. Le mot et l’idée* [Centre International de Synthèse, Première Semaine Internationale de Synthèse 2], Paris, 1930. M. Mauss, *Ouvres*, Paris, 1968–9, 2:456–79.
- ⁷ J. A. Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, Cambridge, 1988; *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations*, ed. N. Yoffee and G. L. Cowgill, Tucson, 1988.
- ⁸ Paris, 1957.
- ⁹ Cf. A. Kroeber, *An Anthropologist Looks at History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963, p. 90.
- ¹⁰ M. Mauss in L. Febvre et al., *Civilization. Le mot et l’idée*, p. 94.
- ¹¹ J. R. Hall, “The Time of History and the History of Times,” in *History and Theory* 19 (1980), p. 118.
- ¹² M. Morony, “Teleology and the Significance of Change,” in *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, ed. F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys, Madison, 1989, pp. 21–6.
- ¹³ See W. Rehm, *Der Untergang Roms im abendländischen Denken*, Darmstadt, 1966; and A. Demandt, *Der Fall Roms. Die Auflösung des römischen Reiches im Urteil der Nachwelt*, Munich, 1984.
- ¹⁴ H.-I. Marrou, “La décadence de l’Antiquité classique,” in *Classicisme et déclin culturel*, pp. 111–4; cf. idem, “Retractatio,” in *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, Paris, 1983, pp. 621–713. C. Cahen is of course one historian who thinks historically about such themes: C. Cahen, *L’Islam des origines au début de l’empire ottoman*, reimp. Paris, 1997, chs. 11–3.
- ¹⁵ *Classicisme et déclin culturel*, pp. 115 ff; and Marrou’s response, *ibid.*, pp. 120 f.

- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 113.
- ¹⁷ H. A. R. Gibb, *Studies in the Civilization of Islam*, ed. S. J. Shaw and R. J. Polk, London, 1962, p. 14.
- ¹⁸ R. Starn, "Meaning-Levels in the Theme of Historical Decline," *History and Theory* 14 (1975), pp. 8–9.
- ¹⁹ E. Schulin, *Die Weltgeschichtliche Erfassung des Orients bei Hegel und Ranke*, Göttingen, 1957, p. 234.
- ²⁰ Braudel, *Grammaire des civilisations*, Paris, 1993, pp. 101–2.
- ²¹ On the trope of such correspondence, see A. Laroui, "The Arabs and Cultural Anthropology: Notes on the Method of Gustave von Grunebaum," in idem, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, pp. 44–80.
- ²² Schulin, *Weltgeschichtliche Erfassung*, p. 229.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 297.
- ²⁴ P. Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 244–5, 250.
- ²⁵ J. G. von Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of History of Mankind*, abridged by F. E. Manuel, Chicago and London, 1968, pp. 340–1.
- ²⁶ Ibid., pp. 343–5.
- ²⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree, New York, 1956, pp. 357 ff.
- ²⁸ E. Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, 5th ed., Paris, 1878, pp. 13–4, 16.
- ²⁹ M. Olender, *The Languages of Paradise. Race, Religion and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, tr. A. Goldhammer, Cambridge, Mass., 1992, pp. 68–70.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 54.
- ³¹ Schulin, *Weltgeschichtliche Erfassung*, p. 296.
- ³² Renan, *Histoire générale*, p. 11.
- ³³ E. Said, *Orientalism*, London, 1978, p. 143.
- ³⁴ J. Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology makes its Object*, New York, 1983, p. 23.
- ³⁵ Gibb, *Studies*, pp. 14–5, 22.
- ³⁶ M. G. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, Chicago, 1974, pp. 34, 89–90, 92, 114–7, and *passim*.
- ³⁷ M. G. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History*, ed. E. Burke, III, Cambridge, 1993, ch. 8, *passim*.
- ³⁸ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, p. 97.
- ³⁹ Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 1, pp. 72 ff.
- ⁴⁰ Schulin, *Weltgeschichtliche Erfassung*, pp. 108–11, 120, 232.
- ⁴¹ C. H. Becker, *Islamstudien*, vol. 1, Leipzig, 1924, p. 16.
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 14; and idem, "Spenglers magische Kultur," in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 77 (N.F., vol. 2 [1923]), pp. 262, 265.
- ⁴³ L. Caetani, "La funzione dell'Islam nell'evoluzione della civiltà," in *Scientia* 11 (1912), pp. 397 f.
- ⁴⁴ O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, New York, vol. 2., 1932, pp. 189 ff., 200 ff.
- ⁴⁵ Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 1, p. 77.

- ⁴⁶ G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth. Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Princeton, 1993.
- ⁴⁷ M. Mauss in Mauss, Febvre, et al., *Civilization*, p. 89.
- ⁴⁸ M. G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, Princeton, 1984; idem, *Material Culture and Urban Identities*, Los Angeles, 1995.
- ⁴⁹ An excellent example is M. Lombard, *Monnaies et histoire d'Alexandre à Mahomet*, Paris and The Hague, 1971.
- ⁵⁰ I cite, almost at random, T. Allen, "The Arabesque, the Beveled Style, and the Mirage of an Early Islamic Art," in *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, ed. Clover and Humphreys, Madison, 1989, pp. 209–44.
- ⁵¹ For instance, C. Cahen, "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie Musulmane du Moyen Age," *Arabica* V (1958), 225–50, VI (1959), pp. 25–56, 223–65; H. Djāit, *Al-Kūfa. Naissance de la ville islamique*, Paris, 1986.
- ⁵² Most recently, Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*.
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CHAPTER 3

Chronophagous Discourse: A Study of the Clerico-Legal Appropriation of the World in an Islamic Tradition*

“novitas, mater temeritatis, soror superstitiones, filia levitatis”

Bernard of Clairvaux

Amongst all religious traditions, Islamic civilization has produced what is perhaps the most deliberately sustained concern with, and profuse body of writing on, history. The concern with the past is manifest in all genres of Arabic *Schrifttum*: poetry was classicized with the establishment of anterior texts and modes; pietistic and legal works established a knowledge of early Muslim practice as *Fürstenspiegel* and valorized salutary and deleterious acts of kings and sages from many histories; Koranic exegesis required monumental knowledge of Muslim precedents and linguistic usages of yore; dynasties, times, and biographies were meticulously chronicled and recorded; universal histories were composed on a massive scale.¹ The entire range of engagements with the past is in evidence, from the officiously technical record of dates and events to the wholesale appropriation of past events by myth. Of these engagements, salvation history is one which was the mainstay of the Muslim clerical establishment. Clearly, this view of history, shared with other monotheisms, was subjected to very individual inflections. One of these is the legal, and it is the purpose of this essay to sketch some lineaments of Islamic views of salvation history and to describe their fundamental structures, before proceeding to study one possible consequence of the salvation historical outlook, namely the inscription within its structures of the theoretical techniques utilized by Islamic legal theory (*usūl al-fiqh*) for reducing legal judgements to arguments from authority. These techniques betoken the all-too-human proclivity

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to apperceive the world in terms of myths of origin. In the Muslim context, this was the means by which the clerical gaze appropriated the world for itself and made this world at once the validation of the clerical meta-narrative and the field of clerical action and authority. It was, of course, simultaneously the means by which other voices and perspectives were marginalized. Analysis of these processes in Islamic tradition will allow for elements of a general theory of dogmatic discourse.

1

Islamic civilization shares an almost universal concern with origins and beginnings, of the world, of social order, as of particular artefacts and customs. The cultures of antiquity cultivated this interest in origins² no less than modern industrial civilization, which with its theories of social contract and its evolutionism is alone in claiming descent from savages and even from lowlier creatures rather than from gods and heroes.³ This pursuit of origins provided, among other perhaps more important things, explanations for the *status quo* of an historical type based upon a conception of generic continuity over time. Chinese literature knew a distinct literary genre of “techno-historical dictionaries” concerned with the first occurrences of things, systematized in the third century BCE.⁴ Arabic literature has likewise left a rich patrimony on *awā'il* (first occurrences),⁵ whose main purpose seemed to have been to provide gems of *recherché* knowledge of an unusual and exotic character, a knowledge that formed part of courtly urbanity.

This register of “firsts” is a record of archetypes;⁶ it indicates single acts of foundation which figure as legendary charters of consequence for perpetuity and in perpetuity. Thus, for example, Arabic historical traditions indicated the archetypal act, which somehow subsumes all later instances in which women used a viscous sugar solution for the removal of body hair, to be King Solomon’s desire to see the hair removed from the Queen of Sheba’s legs. Similarly, the use by kings of astrologers started with Zoroaster, and the manufacture of shields goes back to King David.⁷ Royal sovereignty had its beginning with Lucifer, who was the first to be granted a dominion by God,⁸ and the self-same Lucifer was the first to introduce the concept of measure when, in the primal act of disobedience, he measured himself against Adam.⁹ And though it was often recognized that much of this record of beginnings was spurious,¹⁰ it nevertheless seemed to provide discrete elements which wove together tightly what was known of the world.

The relationship between inaugural events and their present simulacra is one in which the foundation is also the accomplishment, and in which subsequent calques constitute a string of successive instants identical to each other as to the inaugural event.

This schema, in which a series of generically connected events consists of identical moments of foundation and of re-enactment, produces temporal series: instances of dominion whose time is inaugurated with Lucifer, instances of astrological consultation dating from the activities of Zoroaster, and so forth. These consist in reality of an archetypal event, which founds a paradigm that is then repeated in a paradigmatic series. The diachronic flow of this series is arhythmic, for these events do not occur at regular intervals. The time of each of these series of events, like the time of myth, is one with neither perpetual duration nor regular succession, but one which results in configurations of identical content, divided by boundaries akin in their mode of division to musical bars.¹¹ Succession in this sense yields identity, and all imputations of causality or of implication within this type of succession yield only “amplified and unfolded forms of an enriched identity.”¹² It is thus that astrological consultation once inaugurated remains changeless in perpetuity and is merely repeated again and again. And it is thus that a dynasty remains itself, an identity which, in Arabic as in other historical narratives, is reinforced by the signaling of historical and certain dynastic beginnings with new calendars.

Identical successive elements of this type are particularly enriched and amplified when their temporal flow is punctuated and amplified by rhythms dictated by the sacred. It is herein that we encounter the more consequential tempo, rhythmic and otherwise, of amplifications resulting from what has been called “great time.” Great time casts its foundations as a sort of sacral *awā'il*. It is a reservoir of durable and momentous foundations and triumphs. It is time of ritual value, a great time which, in rituals and rites, crosses the ordinary time of continuous flow; it marks the divisions of ordinary time with its own signs, and thus appropriates it. The intensity, durability, and necessity of repetition of great time far outweigh the regular and continuous rhythms of ordinary time.¹³

Ordinary chronometric time, when set against this great time, the time of the sacred and of ritual and its associated myth, is a qualitative vacancy, an ontological sham which receives quality only when marked by what has been described as the “accents” which divide the times of the sacred, as the do the spaces of the sacred.¹⁴ The succession of these accents marking the time of the sacred—the periodic ritu-

als of cultic memory, the irregular rhythms of salvation history which culminate in an end repeating the beginning in all its amplitude—is fully an “amplified and unfolded” form of an “enriched identity.” This structure of succession and re-enactment accounts for salvation history, whose construction of a particular attitude to religious origins is by no means peculiar to Islam, but could be regarded as the very *differentia* of monotheistic confessions.¹⁵

Be that as it may, it has been rightly maintained that in the Muslim conception, Creation is a sign of the End,¹⁶ so that history consists of a great cycle which closes in upon itself, joining beginning with end, each the reality of the other, history being the trajectory traversed in the process of this closure. It must be stressed that the type of Islam under discussion is majoritarian Sunnism in the particular inflection it attained in its clerical shar‘ist complexion; Ismā‘ili and other esotericist sects which adopted a theory of seven cycles of history, each ending with a recommencement, and culminating in a final cycle which ends without recommencement will not be discussed, although the structures of divine temporality herein are identical with those found in other varieties of Islam.¹⁷

We have seen that the vacuous syntagm of ordinary time is the instrument of a finalist paradigm whose instances punctuate the course of this flow at certain loci of accentuation that enclose values of sacredness, lending the sense of sacredness to historical succession. These values are, primarily, an integrality of divine order which reigned with the creation of Adam, the imperative of its complete restoration in Paradise, and the intermittent attempts to calque this order in the history of prophecy, culminating in the definitive and final establishment of prophecy with the Muhammadan order, itself to be re-established on the eve of the Apocalypse. Subsumed under this great cycle are others of smaller magnitude, which partake nevertheless of its sacred substance. As in Christianity, where the Fall justifies the existence of historical time,¹⁸ history in Islamic tradition is “a decisive time of probation”¹⁹ in which God’s presence takes the form of revelation to a string of prophets that culminates in Muhammad.²⁰

Thus the first object created by God was the Pen, which was commanded to write “everything,” and thus inscribed the entire future course of creation²¹ as a register of archetypes and re-enactments. Adam was known by names that betoken his archetypal character. He was called Abū Turāb, the Father of Earth, out of which humanity is fashioned and to which it returns; he was also known as Abū Al-Bashar, Father of Humankind, and Abū Muhammad, the primeval Muhammadan appear-

ance.²² God taught Adam the entire human lexicon from its most sublime to its most vulgar words, with its verbs and nouns, its superlatives and diminutives.²³ Thus the linguistic order assuring human life was established, as were the skills of agriculture and metalwork,²⁴ for perpetuity and in definitive generic form. In the same way, the punishments meted out to Eve marked the lot of womankind for all perpetuity, albeit with a misogynist impulse that almost pales into insignificance compared to medieval Christian writing on women: the pains of conception and menstruation, a lengthy pregnancy, inferiority to men, and so forth.²⁵

Matters of greater consequence, more germane to the realm of the sacred, were likewise delineated at the beginning. Among them are elements of cultic memory, one of the most notable of which is pilgrimage rites to Mecca. Adam was the first to perform the pilgrimage at a spot where his son Seth later built the Ka'ba; he performed it according to the rite of circumambulation (clockwise) which the angels are sometimes said to have performed two thousand years before him.²⁶ The founding moments of the said pilgrimage rites are also variously attributed to Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael.²⁷ But the diversity of attribution is inconsequential. It occurs in the same sources, and it betokens no conflict, as the phylogenetic line is continuous and its elements substantively indistinct, from Adam through Abraham on to Muhammad: the primeval character attributed to the first is equally attributable to the second and culminates in the third. In all cases, we are speaking of a single truth revealed at different times, without differentiation. In these as in many other locations along the line of prophecy, it is understood that that which is revealed is the singular, primeval, and perpetual truth, which is Islam.*

The sole creed available to Adam was *tawhīd*, an archetypal monotheism, and to him were revealed the fundamental interdictions on eating pork, blood, and carrion.²⁸ Abraham was the primeval and timeless Muslim *par excellence* and received what are variously thought to be unnamed fundamental generic institutes of the faith or certain exemplary attributes of the faithful, particularly those concerning purity, such as circumcision and the removal of body hair. He also received and instituted cultic rituals, and most specifically the pilgrimage rites at Mecca.²⁹ These different articulations of the primeval religion—Islam—at different times and in different settings are ones in which the posterior event recapitulates the anterior. When modifications occur, these do not, in Muslim writing, imply invalidation of that which was

* The following passages correspond with parts of Chapter 1.

subject to modification. They are modifications which can be characterized as no other than consummation in generic continuity, an *Aufhebung* of Hegelian import, a phylogenesis. The specific instances of ritual, as of prophecy, are calques of an invariant beginning completely in keeping with the structures of temporality addressed above. Such calques find completion and closure when profanity is wiped off the face of the earth in the history of the future: this occurs when a series of cataclysms will herald the coming of the Mahdī (the Messiah) and the restoration of the Adamic order in preparation for the day of judgement, a day which consigns profanity to the absurdity of Hell and recommences the Edenic order in Paradise.³⁰

Following the antinomian signs of the Hour and its subversions of Order—the rise of the sun from the west, the unleashing of the destructive force of the Gog and Magog upon the world, the reign of the Dajjāl, the Antichrist, and other events that occur in the history of the future³¹—the decks are cleared for the recommencement of the Adamic order, much as they were with the Deluge. The Messiah is called Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd Allāh: he is the Prophet’s namesake and clansman; in other religious traditions he might well have been considered his avatar. The armies ranged against the Dajjāl are commanded by Jesus, son of Mary, who consummates his primeval reality by overcoming the pre-Muhammadan historical specificity which rendered him inconsummate and shedding the vestiges of erstwhile imperfections following his initial appearances: he breaks the Cross and kills all pigs; he abrogates the toleration canonically extended to non-Muslim Peoples of the Book—Christians, Jews, Sabeans, and Zoroastrians—and accepts no further conversions to Islam, but rather kills all the unconverted. The cosmic counterpart at this recapitulation of the purity of the Adamic order is a similar recapitulation of the pre-creation order in preparation for the recommencement of all origins: at the coming of the Hour, God commands the angels to die, before they and the rest of creation are resurrected; until then, nothing remains but the Divine Face (Koran, 28:88 and 55:26–7).³²

Each instance of prophecy, therefore, is a “realization of eschatology,”³³ a regeneration of the time of divinity, much as time was regenerated annually in the ancient Near East, by kings and in the Adonisian myth. The detailed rhythms of these recapitulations in their turn recapitulate numerical and chronological accents of the archetype. The number of men who fought alongside Muhammad at the Battle of Badr against the Meccans in A.D. 624 was the same as that of the Israelites who fought Goliath.³⁴ The day of ‘Ashūrā, the tenth day of the Muslim

month of Muharram on which the Passion of Husain is commemorated, is the equivalent of the Jewish Day of Atonement, and is believed by Shī'ite Muslims to be the day on which God forgave Adam and the day Noah's Ark landed.³⁵ In the month of Ramadān was revealed the Torah, no less than the initial verses of the Koran.³⁶ And much as Christians invested a particular accent in Sunday, being the Lord's Day following the cosmic week and also the day of resurrection,³⁷ Friday for Muslims is the day on which Adam was created and died and the day of the resurrection.³⁸ Friday was so acutely accented that it is said of some persons of exceptional piety that they had a particular preference for sexual intercourse on Fridays.³⁹ Al-Mas'ūdī in the tenth century quoted contemporary Arab Christians as believing the day on which Christ was crucified corresponds to the day Adam was ejected from Heaven and the day he died.⁴⁰

Typological interpretation⁴¹ serves as the hermeneutical complement and the mode of apprehension of this serial recursivity, according to which the history of the sacred is conceived as theodicy. Just as the historical appearance of Jesus in early and, to some extent, in Patristic Christianity, was a proleptic eschatology⁴¹ so are all historical appearances of divine significance prefigurations of the end or recapitulations of the beginning. Moses could be and was read as *figura Christi*, Noah's Ark as *praefiguratio ecclesiae*;⁴³ indeed, medieval European kingship was read as *Christomimesis* and as the crowned *typus Christi*.⁴⁴ The relationship that obtains in this reading is far more substantive than one of allegory.⁴⁵ Both figure and event, as we have seen, are ranged in a sequence outside that of the mere flow of time as accents of intensity that betoken a form of rather erratic immanence. Just as Muhammad and Abraham are removed from chronometric time and transposed to the perspective of epiphany, and just as the Battle of Badr referred to above is removed from its local character of a raid in customary ancient Arabian style and textually read as *jihād* and therefore as an element in theodicy,⁴⁶ so too, according to the hermeneutics of *Heilsgeschichte*, are all significant events removed from concreteness and, to use Auerbach's phrase, "transpose[d] ... into the perspective of eternity."⁴⁷ Thus, Muslim clerics regarded both the Old and the New Testaments to contain a necessary prefiguration of the appearance of Muhammad; any denial of such prefiguration by Christians could only be the result of *tahrīf*, the corruption of the biblical text.⁴⁸ The Church Fathers had already leveled against Jews the charge that their refusal of allegorical interpretation was motivated by their unwillingness to discover Jesus in the Old Testament.⁴⁹

For this typological interpretation to be possible, time needs to be conceived according to a particular physiognomy, some elements of which have already been discussed. Substantive time has to be made specific to the series of events inscribed in the writ of theodicy and restricted to this sequence of moments. In the context of this qualification of time, chronometry is appropriated by the narrative of providence as a mode of discursive organization, as are indeed other modes of organization in historical writing, such as kingship in medieval Arabic historical literature.⁵⁰ The chronophagous discourses of salvation history appropriate time by the reduction of certain moments of history to a privileged assimilation to an eternity, to the great time under such philosophical names as Providence or Destiny, or without such elaboration, as signs, types, prefigurations, and cognate notions.⁵¹ Thus chronological time is a continuum external to the sequence of providential moments and does not have a corresponding rhythm. It is the mere count of unqualified instants and has no substantial or immanentist function, for immanence is a substance which is communicated from one moment of theodicy to its subsequent recapitulation across spaces of qualitative discontinuity notwithstanding their chronometric continuity. It is thus with the constitution of the series commencing with archetype and closing the circle of time by the definitive regeneration of this archetype.

The primacy of narrative over process in this type of historical discourse has been noted;⁵² the narrative of epiphanic and providential succession with its successions of calques—as types, prefigurations, and accomplishments—constitutes the time of the sacred as a space of narrative. In order to comprehend continuity over time, succession has to be represented by a spatial paradigm of contiguity regardless of a discontinuity which, being merely chronological is only virtual. From the time of Parmenides, space has been considered the first condition of possibility for plurality; plurality in time, which is the very plurality required by succession—even the succession of identities, as in this case—makes of time a “supernumerary spatial dimension,” an extension.⁵³ Chronometric or “vulgar” time, the Aristotelian time as measure of movement, is, indeed, itself spacing, a relation of space to itself.⁵⁴

Homogeneity over time can only be assured, as Bergson insisted following a long tradition, with a spatialization that quantifies events bereft of quality and with their arrangement along a continuum.⁵⁵ This dequalification is intended in the Bergsonian analysis for events that occur in the natural sciences and indicates elements in “continuous multiplicities” whose measure is outside themselves. The discontinuity

of instances in the time of theodicy with inaugurations, re-enactments, types, prefigurations, and accomplishments divided by oceans of chronometry does not, however, produce a bald atemporality; it is itself a connected multiplicity, hence a space made into a model for time. It constitutes a “discrete multiplicity” or a discrete manifold in the sense Riemannian geometry gives to multiples that carry their measure within themselves and whose units are numerical only in a determinate virtual sense.⁵⁶ This is a conception grounded in the twin assumptions that space is not homogeneous and that geometry is a doctrine of relations and not of measure. In a discrete rather than a continuous manifold, such as the one under consideration, therefore, measure (spacing) is contained within it rather than coming from an extrinsic axis of continuity.⁵⁷

With providential events, whose measure is within, it is their archetypical substance which provides the substrate of their specific temporality and the principle of their spacing, being the only element in their rhythm. Yet this string of essentially atemporal events, founded, re-enacted, and consummated, is written in terms of the inferior medium of the merely chronological string of moments. There is no tension between the two strings: the latter simply expresses by profane beats the occurrence of the former and its timing; the manner of writing is merely virtual with respect to the ontological weight of sacred history, whose rhythms are expressed in terms of the chronometric moments accented and amplified by sacred history. Yet the moments of sacred time are related to one another by ties similar to those that join the moments of chronology. They are both connected by succession, a relation of space to itself. It is thus possible that the two movements can be posited in correspondence, and it is to this task that Hegel applied himself when synchronizing the movement of the *Geist* with that of nature.

But whereas the time of chronology is bereft of quality, being the succession of instances with no specific densities, the time of providence is fully laden with amplitude which carries not only significance, but also consequence. For in the assembly of succession, the series inaugurated by an act of potency proves so singular as fully to describe the nature of the series, epiphanic or ritual, and to render subsequent moments re-enactments of the archetypal occurrence.

The space of providential time as a space of re-enactments therefore can be construed as a genealogical space of filiation, one of whose main properties is the confirmation of identity by conceiving priority as prefiguration and posteriority as recommencement and accomplish-

ment. The chronophagous proclivity of the discourse on providential history—as of every other genealogical history—is one which dissipates the density of the event rendered providential by depriving it of the specific gravity deriving from its conditions of emergence in its own time. The time of the divine in its spatial representation thus corresponds to the time of myth. It tends to confirm one contention of Lévi-Strauss' theory of myth: myth is structured asemantically, musically, allowing the narrative of myth—or the unfolding of providence in its different tellings and redactions or epiphanies—to be likened to a cylindrical form with an invariant structure (*langue*), alongside an open dimension, its *parole*. In this analysis, the content-specific tellings of the myth (or specific events in the string of salvation) are not anterior to the myth; rather, as Lévi-Strauss notes, it is “the myth [that] moves towards a particular content through the attraction of its specific gravity.”⁵⁸ The invariant is the schema, not its content.

Thus ontogenesis is fully assimilated to phylogenesis; the space of the narrative, like the space of historical time in its sacred telling, is divided by bars akin to those that organize the space of an argument and the space of logic.

2

The generic determination and generic closure thus far encountered are not confined to salvation history or cultic memory. The remit of archetypal explanation is very wide. For one thing, the archetypal construal of the past was of decided educational import. Myth is not only “exemplary history.”⁵⁹ Archetypal events in every field are served up as a body of *exempla* for the guidance of action, and these stretch from the “Homeric encyclopaedia”⁶⁰ across the entire field of historical formations whose cultures are pronouncedly oral. The Cathars of Languedoc adopted the *exemplum* as a primary educational instrument,⁶¹ and the genre of *Fürstenspiegel* functions along lines of the same order. In medieval Arab-Islamic culture the *Fürstenspiegel* genre and prophetic example were united with the educative intent of historical writing in the performance of this task, which was the provision of a body of archetypal examples of political, ethical, and pietist technology.

In all cases, there is in the operation of archetypal reading a notion of time discussed above, premised as it is on the twin moments of foundation and of accentuation along the continuum of chronology. This space is a space not only of succession, but of genealogy, of fecundation; it is one which fixes a position under the auspices of a name. In

the discourse of archetype, the distinction between temporal primacy and demiurgical potency remains virtual, as does the space of chronology, subject as it is to the ontological weight of epiphanic or ritual moments. The Philonic transformation of the argument for providence into an argument for creation⁶² and the assonance of temporal, ontological, and normative primacy in medieval Islamic thought⁶³ are elaborate philosophical formulations of a prior conceptual trope which equally underlies talismanic and sympathetic magic. Priority is spermatically weighted.

This ontological primacy of the archetype, its explicit or implicit demiurgical modality, applies to more than re-enactments already accomplished; such primacy is not confined to the modality of accomplishment of events inscribed in the eschatological history of the future—the future anterior, as it were—nor in the models of wise political behavior contained in *Fürstenspiegel* and in chronicles. This primacy extends equally to re-enactments yet to come that do not have the deterministic certainty of eschatology. Among the many consequences of this almost universal genealogical notion of time is one of particular relevance to medieval Islamic legalism which bases itself upon variants of arguments from scriptural authority. Narratives of archetypal foundation take on the modality of performative statements, and these are contained in the Koran and other texts of canonical status. These texts are, for legal as for pietistic purposes, registers of archetypal acts that might be repeated and calqued. Their imperative and normatively complete character is reducible, when actualized, to the serene ontology of identity which we have seen to be the pillar of the time of archetypes and re-enactments. The indeterminate actuality or probability of these commands and prohibitions, these recommendations and warnings, can by no means dent this ontology of identity; discordance and dissonance are, in this perspective, mere aberrations and correspond ontologically to privation.

Arguments from authority fully recapitulate this structure. They are premised on the virtual notion of temporality consequent upon an ontology of identity. In them, the authoritarian writ is the unique substantive action to be re-enacted. The at-once primitivist and finalist character of re-enactments that occur in salvation history and in cultic memory are similarly constitutive of the relation between formative precedent and legislative consequent in Islamic jurisprudence (as in some other systems of law).

Medieval Muslim jurists were perfectly aware of the problems, some immediately apparent, that accompany any attempt to relate the mutable manifold of daily life to the finalist writ of archetypes

contained in the Muslim canon of legal consequence—the text of the Koran, *hadith* (the body of narratives relating to acts and sayings of Muhammad and some of his immediate companions), and, later, the body of legal precedents consecrated as consensus (*ijmā'*—akin to what was later to be called the *opinio communis doctorum* of the Christian Schoolmen). Indeed, the Muslim science of jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*) is the body of hermeneutical and logical concepts and procedures which aim at the husbandry of the infinite manifold of the world within the bounds of a body of archetypes contained in the Principles (*usūl*) which together constitute the nomothetic text. In modern jurisprudential terms, the main concern of Muslim legal theory is the much-debated question of *lacunae* in law. The highly elaborate deliberation of medieval Muslim jurists is premised on the assumption that their prime concern is one with *lacunae*, for Muslim legal thinking rests on a radical assumption of incompleteness: there can never be enough archetypes, rendering the adequation of reality to archetype the primary concern. Modern discussions of the problem of *lacunae* in law seem rather elementary in comparison.⁶⁴

The good order of the world did not await the accomplishment of the monotheism with the Muhammadan message. Neither were the archetypal foundations contained in the Muslim nomothetic canon the sole founts of order. For order, no matter how uncertain and imperfect, did reign before Muhammad. God had, after all, instructed Adam in the principles of good order.⁶⁵ Humanity had always, albeit imperfectly and unsystematically, used the faculty of reason to maintain forms of order in conformity with human interest. The advent of the *sharī'a* with Muhammad—and it must be stressed that this oft-misunderstood term is a general sign for order, not unlike *nomos* or *dharma*, and does not have in itself unqualified specific determinations—reorganises and systematises proclivities of human nature in the service of divine intent expressed in the nomothetic text; this in such a way that the human interest served by nomothetic commands, and the iniquity stalled by nomothetic prohibition, serve to prepare mundane life for the hereafter.⁶⁶

In a sense, the transition from the natural to this *sharī'*ist regulation of order is akin to that made in natural right theories between *ius gentium* and *ius civile*. This is paralleled by a transition from purely vernacular rational calculation which ascertains human interest, to legal prescriptions which channel and constrain human interest in conformity with the meta-legal requirements of the *sharī'a*. In other words, legal discourse displaces the lexical sense of terms, along with the purely

zweckrational procedures of human order, to a discursive space where primacy is given to the technical sense of terms in the context of jurisprudential discourse and to the jurisprudential rather than to positive natural considerations of causality and of the finality of acts. This procedure, akin to the displacement of meaning in which terms are transferred from a literal to a figurative sense,⁶⁷ is premised on a medieval Arab semantic theory essential to jurisprudence, which divides sense into the lexical, the conventional, and the legal.⁶⁸ An influential modern statement similarly refers to the legal foundation which allows for the objective validity of a legal order as one analogous to the Kantian transcendental conditions of knowledge.⁶⁹

A legal judgment, therefore, is delimited in distinction from nature and the causality of nature or of society (although not against nature, as one modern scholar claimed in an excess of zeal inspired by a Kantian statement).⁷⁰ Such judgement functions as legal causality according to the “principle of importation.”⁷¹ Thus it is not a matter of natural causality that is invoked in legal judgment, but of strictly legal shar’ist causality.⁷² And although this shar’ist legal causality is ultimately connected to religious considerations, these remain in the meta-legal domain, like considerations of human nature and interest. The religious subject and the legal subject are not identical.⁷³

Thus abstracted from nature, and strictly speaking, even from religious ends, Muslim law inscribes its instances of realization within relations of beginning and repetition, archetype and re-enactment, which are specific to it and to its discourse, producing effects of accentuation and bars of division similar to those encountered above in the discussion of cultic and epiphanic great times. This sectoral specificity is signaled, guaranteed, and processed by the technical means deployed for it, the initial one of which is the technical specification of univocity that has been mentioned. But more important and consequential is the technical means of relating precedent and consequent, that is, the fixing of a modality relating archetypal imperatives and acts to come.

This relation can be construed either between unmediated terms, where the precedent and the consequent share explicitly identical conditions, or between these two terms mediated by some consideration of pseudo-casual connection. The precedent, the archetype, the *arché*, finds articulation in the body of discrete statements that exist in the nomothetic discourse. This body is collectively known as *usūl* (sg. *asl*; literally, roots) while the consequent is a judgment, *hukm*, the body of which is collectively known as *furū’* (sg. *far’*; literally, branches). Both terms are particularly apt for genealogical arguments, but I shall term

them henceforth as “principal” and “consequent” or “instance” respectively. A principal is a statement containing within it a judgment that is transitive.⁷⁴ It is a principal the judgment within which is ascertainable directly,⁷⁵ almost by self-evidence, it being a function of the authoritative nature of the text (the Koran which is the utterance of God, and *hadīth*, the salutary example and command of a near-impeccable Prophet). A judgment is standardly defined as “nomothetic discourse when specific to actions”⁷⁶ undertaken or yet to be performed by persons of legal capacity.⁷⁷ The relationship between the two is unmediated when the principal is unambiguous (*nass*) and not open to interpretation, such as the prohibition on the consumption of pork, carrion, and blood. There is also a class of what might be called virtual unambiguity: this is *naskh*, textual abrogation, which occurs when a Koranic verse is thought to have been revealed to Muhammad later than one it contradicts. Examples of such abrogation are the praise of wine and its prohibition by a “later” verse and the legality of temporary marriage (*mut‘a*) in one verse and its prohibition in another. It will readily be noted that the notion of abrogation active here is identical to that with which Islam is related to previous monotheistic revelations, most specifically, to the Old and New Testaments: abolishing the import and force, but not the letter, of many of their statements.

Apart from *nass* and *naskh*, which encompass few facets of life, the infinity of the world is transformed into instances that are rendered instants of the principal by the interpretation of the text. Indeed, the science of jurisprudence, *usūl al-fiqh*, is essentially a body of hermeneutical procedures for the interpretation of texts and for making this interpretation of the canon transitive with respect to the infinite manifold of the mutable world. One could, *mutatis mutandis*, express this in terms of a certain terminological protocol and state that the purpose of the principles of jurisprudence is to transform secondary into primary rationality. It is through procedures of extraordinary formalist and interpretive dexterity that legislation acquires secondary principles of substantively wider input than those contained in the primary text. For the indicators (*adilla*) of judicial necessity comprise not only the *asl*, but also the *ma’qūl al-asl*, the ensemble of extra-textual elaborations upon the sense of the text.

Filiation, the insertion of a given instance into the orbit of the text, here takes the form of an inferential sequence between principal and consequent, for what *ma’qūl al-asl* amounts to is an assertion of the presumption of a virtual causality behind the judgement contained in the text. It is a matter which becomes relevant after the two initial pro-

cedures for establishing definitive filiation (*ta'sīl*) are exhausted or considered inappropriate: these are exegesis, that is, lexical investigation (*tafsīr*), and semantico-historical interpretation (*ta'wīl*), which comprises synecdoche (generalization and particularization), implication, metaphorization, and similar considerations as applied both to single words and to statements. Together, these lead to the recapitulation of the archetype by its indexical representation. These procedures attempt to close any gaps and to clear any uncertainties in the line of filiation and of generic, pseudo-causal connection. This is accomplished by no other means than the assumption of an *Urtext*, the recovery of the original intention embodied in the statement. Things, including statements, are recoverable not through history, but through their original act of positing.

Once this original intention is unraveled, it is posited by the jurist as the ground (*'illa*, pl. *'ilal*) of the judgment; it is upon the *'illa* that the all-important notion of analogy, *qiyās*, is based. And with *qiyās* we come to the fourth procedure of legislation—the other three being, as mentioned, reclamation of the Koran, the *hadīth*, and consensus. But before proceeding any further with the discussion of *qiyās*, it must be stressed that the *'ilal* are neither naturalistic nor rational, but rather strictly legal, being posited as legal causes by the nomothete (God or, peripherally, the Prophet) regardless of whether or not they correspond to any natural or rational exigency. The Mu'tazilites took issue with this claim in asserting a quite different thesis of theodicy: God's decree was invariably correlated to human interest, so it therefore cannot prescribe unreasonably and, correlatively, human reason is capable of legislating by its capacity to apprehend good and evil.⁷⁸ This thesis, however, remained a position unattractive to the majority of Sunni jurists, who generally regarded it as a presumption upon the omnipotence of God, understood as an absolute that could not exclude arbitrariness and unpredictability; the Judaeo-Muslim God is essentially an amoral being who cannot be bound by the moral imperatives He dictates to His creatures. There is therefore no sense in talking of legal judgments proper, as distinct from the natural or rational, before the Muhammadan nomothesis.⁷⁹ So, for example, although the effect of inebriation is judicially designated as the ground (*'illa*) for the prohibition of alcoholic beverages, this natural causality is incidental to the real ground of prohibition (God's interdiction contained in the Koran). Indeed, inebriation does not positively indicate a natural necessity for prohibition; otherwise alcoholic beverages would have been universally prohibited.⁸⁰ Such seemingly natural causes are posited as an indication of divine

beneficence, making the comprehension of law more accessible to minds that are merely human, without positively ascertaining “causality” as conceived by the nomothete,⁸¹ which remains ineffable.

Legal causes, *‘ilal*, are therefore and by almost universal consensus indices (*amārāt*, sg. *amāra*) which, as one medieval scholar stated, are “termed ‘causes’ only figuratively, for a cause is what causes that which is caused, by virtue of itself.”⁸² The potency of the *‘illa* is therefore nominal, and the ascription of effectivity to it is akin to saying that blackness is the ground for asserting the blackness of that which is black.⁸³ The clearest demonstration of this is of course the precise order of rituals: there is no indication of why it is that prayers should take place five times a day; neither is it possible to produce an explanation of pilgrimage rituals or, indeed, of ritual cleanliness prescriptions or divorce procedures.⁸⁴ What renders these actions necessary is the command of nomothetic discourse, which prescribes fasting at the sighting of the new moon which initiates the month of Ramadān—and not another month. If illicit sexual intercourse by a married person, when attested to by four independent male witnesses who had witnessed the act directly, is punishable by stoning to death, this is not because adultery in itself requires stoning.⁸⁵ Stoning is merely the index recoverable as the necessary correlate of a particular form of sexual delinquency attended by certain determinate conditions according to an example set by early Islamic history (the rule is, incidentally, of extra-Koranic provenance).

In this context is inserted the analogical reasoning based on these “causes,” indicative signs. Unmediated “causality” is indicated, as we have seen, by the text. For the rest, there are available in Muslim jurisprudence a variety of methods for ascertaining “causality”: some methods derived from inductivist notions, some based on similitude, others based on concomitance, and yet others appealing to human interest.⁸⁶ In all cases, however, stress is laid on the strictly indexical character of “causality” thus revealed. Its various descriptions have been reduced to nominal variations dependent upon terminological and other conventions.⁸⁷

The literature which treats this material is not always consistent, nor well concatenated, and appears to have resulted from two distinct movements which converged: a scholastic register of retrospective conceptual ratification of legal imperatives already in place, and the ideological elaboration of classical Islamism that will be discussed below. These movements together constituted the *usūl al-fiqh* in its scholastic form in the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. It would not

be productive for our purposes to retrace its course or to pursue the matter of its systematicity.⁸⁸ Of primary interest here is that the axial notion of *'illa* underlying analogical operations is not one which reveals a *ratio legis*, but rather a notion connecting precedent and consequent according to other principles.

The “causal” imperative linking consequent with precedent is based on certainty regarding the appropriateness of a judgment, without this certainty entailing any epistemological consequence. For it is one of practical conclusiveness (*qat'*, pragmatic consequence—not *yaqīn*, certainty of an epistemological sort), with this practical conclusiveness indicated by “causes.” An analogy, or an indicative demonstration of judicial consequence, is an inference which leads to a judgment by a particular interpreter and actor, the jurisconsult; the analogy is not based on some objective or metaphysical ground, but on the basis of indices of correlation as interpreted by him.⁸⁹ The indices of correlation acquire force by virtue of being affirmed by particular actors speaking for a particular interpretative strategy. Such is the force of tradition. The force of legal authority is not one which has its main impulse in the weight of epistemology and its certainties; rather it is constituted by an aesthetic of filiation. Thus the force of the archetype becomes the inferential force of the *qiyās*, grafting a para-logical procedure onto the argument of authority and transferring the action of contiguity in the former, by analogy, to an action of contiguity in the latter. Ultimately, this force is derived from an ontology of identity that we have already encountered.

But before this last point can be properly explored, some further comments on the modality of connection between precedent and consequent are in order. It is manifest that the attribution of similarity is virtual and required by the authority of precedence posited by the interpreting and legislating authority. This similarity is posited within the bounds of a relationship, the invariant element of which is the schema of positing a relative potency, hence of inferential force. The intertwining of these two authorities, indeed their identification or at least their capacity for mutual displacement is a hallmark of genealogical reason, with its identification of seniority, potency, and creativity in continuity and within a medium of identity. It is precisely this modality of relation that Ghazālī (d. 1111) so succinctly encapsulated, when describing the relation of the consequent to the principal as one of submission or compliance (*idh'ān*).⁹⁰ For in order for what is in fact a syntagmatic series of elements divided by blank spaces of chronometric time to be taken for a paradigmatic series in which successive instants are identi-

fied and homogenized by a single act of foundation, a certain violence must intervene. From this results the submission of which Ghazālī spoke: a compliance to a particular instant taken, by clerico-juristic authority, for an invariant model which generically marks the relationship as one of filiation and as an argument from authority. The accentuations of mythical and divine great time are here affected by the denaturing of the consequent instance and its ejection from the realm of the lexical to that of the technical legal sense, with the rhythm of the law taking over from the steady flow of the chronometer.

Yet as in great time discussed in the first part of this chapter, the rhythm of law is not discontinuous, but copies the structures of ordinary time. The main feature of this time, as we have seen, is a spatialized structure of pure succession, in which the magnitude of spaces dividing instants is irrelevant for structural and diagrammatic purposes alike, as to the imputation of imperative seriality and of consequence. In view of this irrelevance, it is unsurprising that there was a concerted attempt to represent legal analogies in syllogistic form.⁹¹ This not only carried the rational authority of Aristotle; of greater importance for the present argument, this seriality arranges precedent and consequent in an unambiguous structure of spatial succession and linear order. Certainly Ghazālī and other legal theorists felt that the Aristotelian syllogism produced certainty of a higher, optimal order than inferences based on indices of similarity, including metaphors (*tamthīl*); but, as we have seen, the science of jurisprudence produces a pragmatic certainty based upon an epistemological probabilism which is nonetheless conclusive.⁹² A distinctly forced element clearly emerges in this procedure, especially in the attempt to transform the judgement contained in the principal to a major premise, to construe the *'illa* as a minor premise, and to build analogies of similitude along the BARBARA, i.e., universal affirmative or “first” mood of the Aristotelian syllogism.

Both proponents and opponents of legal hermeneutics clearly recognized that this syllogistic transformation had no epistemological force. Avicenna for one strongly repudiated this presumption upon syllogistic logic and with his unflinching rigor anatomized its vacuity, insisting that a syllogism cannot be built upon indices of correlation. He further argued that legal analogies are less akin to the logic of Aristotle than to the inferences of phrenology.⁹³ At the opposite end of the spectrum lay the relentless nominalist empiricism of Ibn Taymīya (d. 1327), an opponent of Aristotelian logic on grounds of a radically sensualist epistemology and of a notion of the innate nature of logical inference. The thrust of his criticism was the reducibility of syllogisms

to hermeneutical operations based on notions of similarity, on the assumption that similarity is the sole means of building generalities.⁹⁴ The starting point is always the particular.

Indeed, even the hearty advocates of syllogistic form in jurisprudence emphasized that their inferences were based on treating a particularity *as if* it were a generality.⁹⁵ An analogy is the transference of certain features of a particularity to another by the subsumption of the instance under the sway of the principal, treated as a generality.⁹⁶ The main feature of an analogical relationship, as we have seen, is commonality of index. This index might be iconic, metaphorical, or metonymical, so that, as a major medieval Arabic rhetorician noted, “it is permissible to imagine the one to be the other.”⁹⁷ It is difficult to constrain analogical operations evident in Islamic jurisprudence to the substantial and the formal (which include the purely nominal, hence metaphorical) evident in legal reasoning in general.⁹⁸ It is equally insufficient simply to classify its tropes in terms of arguments *a simili*, *a fortiori*, and *a contrario* which are as common in legal reasoning generally as they were in medieval scholasticism.⁹⁹ Nor is it quite useful to perform the task of distributing its modes of operation among metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche, not least because these terms have been variously defined as rather lifeless models through the classical tradition until the present time.¹⁰⁰

The tropes of Islamic legal hermeneutics and its limitless operation of metic intelligence can be seen to include all the above rhetorical figures in all the definitions given to each. More germane to the present argument, however, is a matter that has already been brought up more than once, namely, the conditions of efficacy of the legal inference under discussion. These are conditioned by the fact that the formalism of legal reasoning is virtual, for the logic of argumentation, including legal argumentation, can in the reality of its practice only be non-formal, and always contains a surplus.¹⁰¹ Judicial reasoning, in opposition to the formal, is rarely correct or incorrect,¹⁰² as Muslim jurists discovered a millennium ago. Legal hermeneutics can only be unravelled when we regard the mutual convertibility of metonymic, metaphorical, and synecdochal forms—which one almost always encounters in discursive practice—as the subtle interplay of, and transference among, formal and semantic operations whose effect is the addition and suppression of referential elements.¹⁰³ All this allows us to recapitulate matters discussed in the first part of this chapter, and to re-enter a world in which it is possible linguistically to convert subjects and objects, words and things. Here, as Frye notes, the “sense of verbal

magic is sublimated into a quasi-magic inherent in sequence or linear ordering. Hence the medieval fascination with the syllogism and the great medieval dream of deducing all knowledge from the premises of revelation.”¹⁰⁴ Virtual formalism is a dream whose reality can only be sustained by extra formal means: in our case, by the authority of the clerico-legal institution whose particular passion and vocation it was.

3

It is the quest for similarity which invests events with a legal sense, bereft of nature, as it apports to events an identity freed from chronometric distance; it is this quest which removes from events any “primary” rationality they may have and inserts them into the “secondary” universality of legal discourse. With this denaturalization of discourse, we have the positing of successive instances of identity, the one represented as history, the other represented by its diagrammatic analogue, inference. In all cases, we have a metaphysic of identity represented as an epistemology of correspondence that characterized the entire space of medieval Arab-Islamic scientific (*Wissenschaftlich*) discourse, including the science of jurisprudence—a situation not dissimilar to that which prevailed in pre-modern European thought, in which representation was “posited as a form of repetition,” a situation in which the world speaks in signatures that are legible by means of analogy.¹⁰⁵ In the arena of Arab-Islamic civilization, the quest for historical origins and the interpretation of events as re-enactments—of wise dealings, of divine intervention and guidance, of lawful acts according to legalistic criteria—was a privileged field for the work of similarities and the legibility of signatures.

Yet we have seen the inferences from the past in the field of *fiqh* to be epistemologically only virtual. Its quasi-propositional structure is over-determined by the argumentative desire of the clerico-legal institution (the *‘ulamā*), a matter only a faint glimmer of which has reached the register of standard scholarship on the matter of analogy in Islamic thought.¹⁰⁶ This matter is also connected to factors such as the characteristics—and consequent discursive effects—of Muslim judicial organization.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, it is well known that the science of legal theory, *usūl al-fiqh*, is not really a methodology of law but a legal epistemology whose construction postdates that of positive judicial doctrine, a doctrine whose efficacy was guaranteed and empowered by authority.¹⁰⁸

Of direct interest here, however, is another matter, one which pertains to the authority of evidently spurious lines of argumentation and

the adoption of the genealogical logic of filiation as the main mode of inference. This logic was not confined to traditional sciences, but was also evident in the rational sciences of the time. One of the most rigorous and mathematically formalized of these rational sciences, alchemy, depended for its workings on *a priori* numerical and other proportions of a magical nature; it appears that the demonstrative mode remained, above all, a topical feature, a mode for organizing traditional material to which the logical moment is subordinate.¹⁰⁹ Islamic Peripateticism itself—not unlike other Peripateticisms—appears constituted on the *presumption* of propositional and inferential rigor.¹¹⁰ It constructed for itself, moreover, a legendary history of authority, proposing itself as *philosophia perennis* since its establishment, in definitive form and usually through divine inspiration, by Idrīs-Hermes, the first of all prophets, who received (from Gabriel in some sources) the arts of writing, arithmetic, astronomy, and philosophy.¹¹¹ The history of philosophy is that of the transmission of an invariant knowledge from impeccable origins, along a line that weaves together philosophical and prophetic genealogy through several moments—including such wisdom as was imparted to King Solomon by the Chthonian spirits (*jinn*) and culminating with Aristotle's appearance in a dream to the Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–833), which caused Aristotle to be translated into Arabic and initiate the Islamic re-enactment of Aristotelianism.¹¹² One thing that facilitated this legendary account of origins is the aphoristic and anecdotal style of Islamic histories of philosophy, which among other (structural) things, served to keep elements of doctrinal content at bay¹¹³ and thus rendered possible the construction of quasi-historical filiations by binding events abstracted from their conditions of emergence to the continuum of a particular time, the time of the history of philosophy. Facilitating this process, as in the case of constructing legal facts, is the authority of the “mytho-logical drift (*dérive*)” described by one recent study of legal discourse as the articulation of “*ideaux logiciens*” and myths of origin.¹¹⁴

The material on which this “drift” works is, as in the case of the history of philosophy just mentioned, a body of discrete precedents. For after all, each narrative of Muslim tradition of legal consequence is a singular “judicial oracle,”¹¹⁵ and oracular logos is invariably encrypted. Muslim juristic theory is a legal semiotics which regards the open book of nomothetic discourse—whose natural form is opened by metaphor, implication, generalization, etc.—with eyes set on the possibility of its closure, indeed on the necessity of its closure by specific interpretation.¹¹⁶ For if, as Lotman asserts, “indeterminacy is the

measure of information,”¹¹⁷ closure is the measure of determinacy, of sense, of conclusiveness and, consequently, of practice. Just as Christian canon law construed determinacy by tracing a logical path that approaches the sacred text in asymptotic fashion, with constant reference to textual fragments out of which the inferential itinerary is made to proofs *pro et contra*,¹¹⁸ and just as Jewish scholars used single texts to demonstrate contrary points as part of their training,¹¹⁹ it is likewise here the closure of the text of the principal to chronometric time and to historical conditions of emergence which constitutes the axial feature of its interpretation as principal. Closure betokens a vertical connection to archetype, not an intra-textual or historical filiation. Thus the fragmentary nature of biblical stories strengthens their vertical connection, and indeed Old Testament figures embody moments of this vertical connection,¹²⁰ and Christian exegesis thus controls polysemy by its affirmation of biblical unity.¹²¹ The fragments of principal that make up the body of Muslim texts of legal relevance and consequence and the exclusively topical structure of the works of *hadīth* and of law,¹²² are likewise vertically disciplined by the control of polysemy—indeed, by the closure to polysemy with each act of interpretation-legislation—and by a vertical connection to a higher order, a meta-legal order which affords the substance of similarity that arranges succession according to its own time, the time of identity.

This meta-legal order, along with the relation of consequent and precedent it superintends, is one whose construction, elaboration, maintenance, and integrity must be managed and invigilated over time and across space. It must be institutionalized, paradigmatically and socio-politically, as a *habitus* of the spirit based on repetition and constant ratification. The violence it does to history and reality, its manifest arbitrariness (in the sense this term came to carry in structural linguistics), is the hallmark of its efficacy and is strongly institutionalized both socially and intellectually.¹²³ In the psychoanalytic terms used by one analysis of similar procedures in medieval Christian Scholasticism, this violence to nature is guaranteed by it constituting a “cultural super-ego.”¹²⁴

The inferential sequences contained in Islamic law—as in Christian canon law and indeed, in law *tout court*—is an enunciation whose obsessional repetition of the textual repertoire announces the enunciating authority; this authority is the institution which makes the inference a location for its presence and for the effect of its potency. It is the power to prescribe action which makes possible the arbitrary enunciation and which guarantees its own credibility, veracity, and inferential

truth. It is the same authority which carves out a region of the imaginary, renders it sequentially systematic, and affirms its denatured specificity by what, in the context of defining the elaboration of the religious field, has *mutatis mutandis* been termed as “autarchic self-reference.”¹²⁵

Inference is effected, therefore, by the sheer affirmation of inference, and consequence is likewise effected by the affirmation of sequence, provided the affirmation is that of a specific authority whose task it is to affirm these matters. That which empowers the institutional enunciation and endows it with veracity is its ceremonial performance, “of a clearly pronounced obsessional character”¹²⁶ of reading the text of the principal, and reading the instance as a moment of the principal. Although Islamic logolatry does not have the dramatic procedural elements of canon law that was systematically developed in medieval Europe,¹²⁷ it does share with it as a primary mechanism passage through “le lieu mythique.”¹²⁸

The inferential celebration is, in anthropological terms, a ritual. It is characterized by the repetition and routinization of the finalist model of singular sense closed to interpretation. It is a ritual celebration of a myth of identification by origin. Like all other situations attested in ethnographical literature, ritual and myth interact in a complex of subtle forms,¹²⁹ the difference being that although it is theoretically possible to construe the narratives of Muslim tradition and of the Koran as a constellation of connected and sequential series, it is in fact individual motifemes that enter into each inferential ritual.¹³⁰ These individual motifemes—the principals, narratives of action or of acts of command and of nomothetic enunciation—are the occasion for the ritual of inference, the end of which is primarily classificatory. Consequent upon this function is the heavy inclination toward metaphorization and cognate operations in analogies and other shar‘ist procedures, for these can be seen as primarily classificatory.¹³¹ Inclusion in a string of inferential filiation, which we have seen to be the primary operation of legal theorizing, is a taxonomic act; its parent medium, the metaphysic of similarity and the succession of identities, affords the vast space of filiation.

Within this space, we have what is in fact a nominal attribution of inclusion, and, concomitant with this attribution, indices of correlation serve as tokens of inclusion within a space—a time sequence—as defined by its origins. In this process, as in legal proofs in a very different setting, the signifier tends to absorb the signified.¹³² This signifier—the principal and that which it wholly realizes in each instance,

Islam—mediates the different spheres of the semiosis and mediates semiotic with nonsemiotic reality.¹³³ This mediation in the context of this discussion—of the semiotic and the nonsemiotic, of the denatured and the natural, of the secondary and the primary—appears to be based on integrating the one with the other and reducing them mutually to one another; this mutuality, however, rests on the assumption of a hierarchy which betokens the generation of temporal precedence along a continuum of similitude.¹³⁴ This defines a situation in which identifiable units are co-extensive as well as co-intensive, changing into one another, thus performing one of the tasks assumed by Lévi-Strauss' totemic operators.¹³⁵ It is invariably thus that trans-historical collectivities are posited. In the historical context relevant here, Islamdom is thus generated; but it is a name representing collectivities assimilable to the ambit of the name "Islam" only because it is so posited by the authority of the clerico-legal institution. Thus, in a certain sense, it is the imaginary, denoting nothing and connoting everything, that is the operative condition of representations such as these—the representation of Islam as the operative truth of every judgment made in its name by the institution whose task it is to conjure up the universality of the name "Islam." A similar situation is indicated in an analysis of Roman law which gives primacy to the conceptual over the historical reality that attempted to realize it, thus showing that "the 'divine' origins of institutions were, under their mythical cloak, much truer" than modern views.¹³⁶

It is by semiotic means such as those described above that the world is first rendered into legal form, its fragments then assimilated to a protoplasm of substantive similitude and temporal continuity and thus rendered generically Islamic. It is thus that positive law becomes Islamic, that a history becomes Islamic, that a society becomes Islamic. All these trans-historical entities fall under the classificatory potency of a name which connotes everything and intrinsically denotes nothing; it is a name that husbands difference and diversity, over space and in time, and causes it to mutate into singularity and similitude.

The science of legal theory, *usūl al-fiqh*, was one means by which the Muslim clerico-legal institution caused the world to lose its bearings in time and space and become Islamic. It is a discursive formation, by which the institution's formally governing human intercourse could be read as Islamic signatures by the clerico-legal gaze which seeks fully to appropriate the world. But this was by no means a process which knew definitive closure. For one thing, the world was imperfect, and many institutes and customs that were condoned by the clerico-

legal institution, the *'ulamā* or Muslim priesthood,¹³⁷ were usually regarded as extra-legal. One main category of such rulings is *istihsān* and *istishāb*, legal preference on the basis of equity, custom, or the public weal which might contradict judgments arrived at by analogy.¹³⁸ It is a procedure which was much execrated, but nevertheless widely used in an implicit sense or without the use of the technical term. Another manner of assimilating imperfection, to the shar'ist world was the procedure of *hiyal*, legal stratagems, which employed legal means for achieving extra-legal or even illegal ends (such as the prohibition of usury), or using analogies in a purely nominal, indexical sense (here used as a criticism rather than positive description of legal reality).¹³⁹ There were even *hiyal* regarded as salutary, and there is a vast body of these which, together with *istihsān*, provided the corpus of rulings governing sharecropping and rents, most comprehensively expressed in Hanafi commercial law; the last became the most complete and universal merchant's law in the medieval Near East and beyond.¹⁴⁰

But there was a totalizing internal dynamic within the science of *usūl al-fiqh* which was not content to coexist with legal redundancy or with social realities not comprehended by the legal definition. As early as the eleventh century, al-Bajī (d. 1081) declared the formal proofs of law to comprise not only textual principals and their rational elaboration (analogy broadly considered), but *istishāb* as well.¹⁴¹ It was left for al-Shātibī (d. 1388) to produce the most prodigiously sustained and comprehensive attempt to deploy the vast legacy generated by half a millennium of legal and meta-legal thinking he had at his disposal, and create a synthesis which totalized order *tout court*, under the Islamic signature within the ambit of the *sharī'a*.

The strategy adopted for this totalization by Shātibī was to transform legal judgments into inferential certainties bereft of the probabilism discussed above, thus strengthening and absolutizing the quasi-propositional form of legal deduction,¹⁴² and simultaneously to widen the ambit of the *sharī'a* to encompass all devotional and secular human activity. The latter task was accomplished by reviving and amplifying the somewhat unpopular, though potent, idea of the necessary concordance between divine command and human interest. Shātibī thus put into effect an implicit notion of natural law and deployed a notion of the index of correlation (*'illa*) between principal and instance which is given a directly utilitarian turn, the *'illa* indicating implicit or explicit interests served by a command or a prohibition.¹⁴³ All such indices are derivable from the axial notion of nomothetic intent in which Shātibī grounds his enterprise. This comprehends five categories of human

interest: divine intent sets out to preserve religion, life, sanity, progeny, and wealth.¹⁴⁴ Thus custom is raised to the orbit of principals,¹⁴⁵ and *istihsān* becomes a consideration necessary for the validation of every judgement without exception.¹⁴⁶ The final stroke of this systematic closure is the direct reduction of human reason to divine inspiration.¹⁴⁷

The enterprise undertaken by Shātibī, with its combination of lawyers' realism and the scholasticism of jurist-theologians, was one which sutured—in a manner so tight as to render their texture seamless—the topics that have been addressed in the course of this and the preceding section of this essay. In other words, the totality of human action is divided between the merely natural and the nomothetic. This primary classification gives immense force to the vertical hinging of all rational human activity—rational by means of the correspondence between reason and the primal nature of right human action revealed in nomothetic discourse—and connects this activity directly and ineluctably with its archetypes. We have seen this to be a virtual connection premised on the elision of chronometric history and the construction of a generic history of the legal fact as re-enactment of its origin. With Shātibī we have the impeccable and integral statement of the legislative process as a ritual reading of a myth of origin and of repeated identity, of legal reason as mytho-logical practical reason, of the Muslim legist as mythologue. Shātibī thus affords the definitive statement of legal reason rendered a genealogical practical reason with a finalist charter, the practical reason of genealogy read backwards, a reason invested with the capacity for construing all human action as regenerative of its primeval innocence. The myths of origin thus break away from the usual setting of myth, the setting of stories. Instead the clerico-legal gaze here reads origins as if inscribed within the very texture of daily life. It is thus that Shātibī definitively closes, in the world under his supervision and that of his corporation, the gap between the two modes of divine will, the providential will (*irāda qadariya*) manifested in creation, and the commanding will (*irāda amrīya*) manifested in nomothetic discourse.¹⁴⁸ This imaginary concordance is possible only when ratified by the *'ulamā*, for only they are capable of turning sequence into consequence, the virtual into the actual, and of making practical reason out of canonical discourse. In this they are much like the sorcerer, described as basing his art on three errors: "He first mistakes the metaphoric symbol (i.e., the verbal label 'this is the hair of X') for a metonymic sign. He then goes on to treat the imputed sign as if it were a natural index, and finally he interprets the supposed natural index as a signal capable of triggering off automatic consequences at a distance."¹⁴⁹

Notes

- ¹ No adequate general account of Arabic historical writing exists. Dated as this may be, the following is serviceable when used with care: H. A. R. Gibb, "Ta'rikh," in idem, *Studies in the Civilization of Islam*, ed. S. J. Shaw and W. R. Polk, Boston, 1962, pp. 108–37. See also T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical period*, Cambridge, 1994. See the annotated bibliography of L. Ammann, "Kommentiertes Literaturverzeichnis zu Zeitvorstellungen und geschichtlichem Denken in der islamischen Welt," *Die Welt des Islams* 37/1 (1997), pp. 28–87.
- ² See, for instance, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, ed. Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, Baltimore, 1935.
- ³ Cf. Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason*, Chicago, 1976, pp. 52–3.
- ⁴ J. Needham, "Time and Eastern Man," in idem, *The Grand Titration*, London, 1969, pp. 267–8.
- ⁵ Editors' introduction to Abu Hilāl al-'Askarī, *Al-Awā'il* [First Occurrences], vol. 1, ed. M. Misrī and W. Qassāb, Damascus, 1975, p. 13.
- ⁶ M. Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return*, trans. W. R. Trask, London, 1955, p. 105.
- ⁷ Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī't-Tārikh* [The Comprehensive History], vol. 1, ed. C. J. Tornberg, Beirut, 1965–6, pp. 223, 237, 273.
- ⁸ Al-Tabarī, *Tārikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk* [History of Prophets and Kings], vol. 1, ed. M. J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1879, pp. 78–80.
- ⁹ Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, vol. 1, p. 72.
- ¹⁰ For instance, Miskawayh and Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī, *Al-Hawāmil wa'l-Shawāmil* [Of Matters Neglected and Matters Comprehensive], ed. A. Amīn and A. Saqr, Cairo, 1951, p. 122.
- ¹¹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, trans. R. Manheim, New Haven and London, 1955, p. 108.
- ¹² Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. K. Blamey, Cambridge, Mass., 1987, p. 183.
- ¹³ Georges Dumézil, "Temps et mythes," *Recherches Philosophiques* 5 (1935/6), pp. 240–2, 245.
- ¹⁴ Cassirer, *Symbolic Forms* 2, pp. 118–9.
- ¹⁵ John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* [London Oriental Series 34], Oxford, 1978, p. ix.
- ¹⁶ Y. Moubarac, *Abraham dans le Coran*, Paris, 1958, p. 130.
- ¹⁷ On the cyclism of the Ismā'ili notion of history, see among others, P. Walker, "Eternal Cosmos and the Womb of History: Time in Early Islamic Thought," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9/3 (1978), pp. 355–66.
- ¹⁸ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*, Chicago, 1955, p. 181.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Moubarac, *Abraham dans le Coran*, pp. 131–2.
- ²¹ Tabarī, *Tārikh*, vol. 1, pp. 29–30.
- ²² Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya wa'n-Nihāya* [The Beginning and the End], Cairo, 1932, p. 97; Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa't-Tārikh* [The Book of Beginning and of History], vol. 3, ed. C. Huart (attributed to Balkhi), Paris, 1899 ff., p. 10.
- ²³ Tabarī, *Tārikh*, vol. 1, pp. 95–6; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, vol. 1, p. 71.

- ²⁴ Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, pp. 128–31.
- ²⁵ Mas'ūdī, *Akhbār al-Zamān wa man abādahu al-hidhān* [Narratives of Time and of What Has Waned], ed. A. Sāwī, Beirut, 1980, p. 74.
- ²⁶ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 1, pp. 38, 40; Mas'ūdī, *Akhbār al-Zamān*, p. 73; Ibn Qutayba, *Al-Ma'ārif* [The Book of Learning], ed. Th. `Ukāsha, 2nd ed, Cairo, 1969, p. 20; Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh* [History], Beirut, 1960, vol. 1, p. 6.
- ²⁷ Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, p. 27; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, vol. 1, p. 155; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 1, pp. 103, 107.
- ²⁸ Maqdisī, *Al-Bad' wa't-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, p. 10.
- ²⁹ Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, pp. 309 ff.
- ³⁰ A. Al-Azmeh, *Al-Kitāba al-Tārīkhīya wa'l-ma'rifa at-tārīkhīyya* [Historical Writing and Historical Knowledge], Beirut, 1993, ch. 3, *passim*.
- ³¹ "Dadjdjal" and "Hour," in *Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition*, ed. J. Wensinck, Leiden, 1960; A. Al-Azmeh, "Barbarians in Arab Eyes," *Past and Present* 134 (1992), pp. 15 ff.
- ³² Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāyat al-Bidāya wa'n Nihāya* [The End of the Beginning and the End], vol. 1, ed. M. F. Abū 'Ubayya, Riyādh, 1968, pp. 171–2, 176, 247; Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, p. 55.
- ³³ This term is borrowed from Löwith, *Meaning in History*, p. 188.
- ³⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 1, p. 219.
- ³⁵ Eitan Kohlberg, "Some Shi'i Views on the Antediluvian World," *Studia Islamica* 52 (1980), p. 57.
- ³⁶ Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 2, p. 34.
- ³⁷ Gilles Quispel, "Time and History in Patristic Christianity," in *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* 3 [Bollingen Series 30.3], ed. Joseph Campbell, Princeton, 1957, p. 91.
- ³⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, pp. 278–9. See the sceptical criticism of Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 1, p. 20.
- ³⁹ Ibn Qutaiba, text in *Al-Jins 'ind al-'Arab* [Sex among the Arabs], vol. 1, Köln, 1991, p. 7.
- ⁴⁰ Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbih wa'l-Ishrāf* [The Book of Advertence and of Observation], ed. M. J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1894, p. 125.
- ⁴¹ For a particularly succinct account of this matter, see Tzvetan Todorov, *Symbolisme et interpretation*, Paris, 1978, pp. 110 ff.
- ⁴² Quispel, "Time and History," pp. 87 ff.
- ⁴³ Of the vast literature on this matter, the reader is particularly referred to the crystalline account of Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in idem, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Manchester, 1984, p. 38.
- ⁴⁴ E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton, 1957, pp. 88–9 and *passim*.
- ⁴⁵ On the distinction between allegory and typology, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed., London, 1977, pp. 69 ff.; and Auerbach, "Figura," p. 54.
- ⁴⁶ On this transformation, see Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, pp. 25–7.
- ⁴⁷ Auerbach, "Figura," p. 42.
- ⁴⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, vol. 2, pp. 147 ff. For such a typological interpretation of the Old Testament, see Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, *Hidāyat al-hayārā fi ajwibat*

- al-Yahūd wa'n-Nasāra* [Guide to the Perplexed Concerning Responses to Jews and Christians], Beirut, pp. 51 ff. See also Al-Azmeh, *Al-Kitāba al-tārīkhīya*, pp. 32–4; and idem, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, London, 1986, p. 111.
- ⁴⁹ Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1964, p. 74.
- ⁵⁰ Aziz Al-Azmeh, “Histoire et narration dans l’historiographie arabe,” *Annales Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, March–April 1986, pp. 411–31; and cf. Roland Barthes, “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives,” in idem, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. S. Heath, London, 1977, p. 99.
- ⁵¹ Dumézil, “Temps et mythes,” p. 245.
- ⁵² Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, p. 91.
- ⁵³ Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution*, pp. 191–2, 200.
- ⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Brighton, 1982, p. 43.
- ⁵⁵ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson, London and New York, 1910, pp. 98–9, 107–8. See the comments on this tradition by Derrida, *Margins*, 35–7, 40–4. The reader is advised that the present author tends more towards the epistemological interpretation of Bergson as in Gilles Deleuze, *Le Bergsonisme* (Paris, 1966), than towards the psychologistic interpretation often proposed as, for instance and with respect to matters germane to the topic under discussion, by Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris, 1976), esp. ch. 7.
- ⁵⁶ Deleuze, *Le Bergsonisme*, pp. 31–2, 36.
- ⁵⁷ Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*, trans. William Curtis Swabey and Marie Collins Swabey, New York, 1953, pp. 440 f.
- ⁵⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man: Introduction to a Science of Mythology* 4, trans. John and Doreen Weightman, London, 1984, pp. 633, 629; and cf. Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. Ann Shukman, London and New York, 1990, p. 34.
- ⁵⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Traité d’histoire des religions*, Paris, 1949, pp. 366–7; and cf. ch. 11, *passim*.
- ⁶⁰ Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, Oxford, 1963, ch. 4, *passim*.
- ⁶¹ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294–1324*, trans. Barbara Bray, Harmondsworth, 1980, p. 344.
- ⁶² Harry Anstryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Cambridge, Mass., 1968, I:298.
- ⁶³ Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 1ff.
- ⁶⁴ For general accounts in English of Muslim jurisprudence, see M. H. Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Cambridge, 1991; and W. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories. An Introduction to Sunni Usul al-fiqh*, Cambridge, 1998.
- ⁶⁵ Shātibī, *Al-I’tisām* [The Refuge], ed. Muhammad Rashīd Ridā, vol. 1, Cairo, 1914 [A.H. 1332], p. 46.

- ⁶⁶ For instance, Shātībī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt fī usūl al-ahkām* [Concordances in the Principles of Jurisprudence], ed. Muhammad Munīr, Cairo, 1922 [A.H. 1341], vol. 2, pp. 27–8, 255–6, vol. 3, pp. 7, 88.
- ⁶⁷ Pazdawī, *Kanz al-wusūl* [The Treasured Aim], published on the margins of Bukhārī, *Kashf al-asrār* [Revelation of Secrets], Istanbul, 1884 [A.H. 1301], p. 1014.
- ⁶⁸ Ghazālī, *Al-Mustasfā min ‘ilm usūl al-fiqh* [Conspectus of the Principles of Jurisprudence], Cairo, 1937 [A.H. 1356], vol. 1, pp. 322 ff.; Shawkānī, *Irshād al-fuhūl ilā tahqīq al-haqq min ‘ilm al-usūl* [Guidance of the Capable for the Scrutiny of Jurisprudential Principles], Cairo, 1937, pp. 21–2. In fact, semiosis in medieval Arab-Islamic thought is not confined to a tripartite theory of signification, but was multipartite. See Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 106 ff., 115 ff.
- ⁶⁹ Hans Kelsen, *Pure Theory of Law*, trans. Max Knight, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, paras. 3, 16, 34d.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., para. 17.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., para. 18.
- ⁷² Āmidī, *Al-Ihkām fī usūl al-ahkām* [Precision of the Principles of Judgement], vol. 1, Cairo, 1914, p. 182.
- ⁷³ Baber Johansen, “Staat, Recht und Religion im Sunnitischen Islam,” in *Essener Gespräche zum Thema Staat und Kirche* 20, ed. H. Marré and J. Stütig, Münster, 1986, p. 17; idem, “Die Sündige, gesunde Amme. Moral und gesetzliche Bestimmung (hukm) im islamischen Recht,” *Die Welt des Islams* 28 (1988), pp. 271–3, 278–9; Chafik Chehata, “La religion et les fondements du droit en Islam,” *Archives de Philosophie de Droit* 18 (1973), pp. 19–21. Cf. Kelsen, *Pure Theory of Law*, para. 18.
- ⁷⁴ Ibn ‘Aqīl, “Kitāb al-jadal ‘ala tariqat al-fuqahā’” [Dialectic According to Jurists], ed. George Makdisi, *Bulletin d’Etudes orientales* 20 (1967), para. 48.
- ⁷⁵ Baidāwī, *Minhāj al-wusūl ilā ‘ilm al-usūl* [The Method for Acquiring the Principles of Jurisprudence], Cairo, 1908 [A.H. 1326], p. 94.
- ⁷⁶ Ghazālī, *Mustasfā*, vol. 1, p. 35.
- ⁷⁷ Al-Bājī, *Kitāb al-minhāj fī tartīb al-hijāj* [Methods of Argument] *Publications du Département d’Islamologie de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne* 7, ed. A. Turki, Paris, 1978, para. 19, pp. 300 ff.; Āmidī, *Ihkām*, vol. 1, p. 227.
- ⁷⁸ See Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 82, 88 ff.
- ⁷⁹ For a classic statement, see Ghazālī, *Mustasfā*, vol. 1, pp. 8, 55 ff. For particularly pronounced and acute statements which contain a denial of any notion of causality, however metaphorical: Ibn Hazm, *Al-Ihkām fī usūl al-ahkām* [Precision of the Principles of Judgement], ed. Ahmad Shākir, Cairo, n.d., pp. 1127–31.
- ⁸⁰ Ibn Rushd (al-Jadd), *Al-Muqaddimāt al-mumahhidāt* [Prefatory Principles], Cairo, n.d., p. 23.
- ⁸¹ Pazdawī, *Kanz al-wusūl*, pp. 661, 663.
- ⁸² Ibn ‘Aqīl, ‘*Kitāb al-Jadal*’, p. 42.
- ⁸³ Al-Basrī, *Kitāb al-mu’tamad fī usūl al-fiqh* [The Definitive Book of the Principles of Jurisprudence], ed. Muhammad Hamīd Allāh et al., Damascus, 1964–5, p. 704.

- ⁸⁴ Ibn Jinnī, *Khasā'is* [Properties of the Science of Language], vol. 1, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī Najjār, Cairo, 1952–6, p. 48; Shātibī, *I'tisām*, vol. 2, p. 129.
- ⁸⁵ Ghazālī, *Mustasfā*, vol. 1, p. 93.
- ⁸⁶ Convenient overviews can be sought in Shawkāni, *Irshād*, p. 210 ff.; and Baidāwī, *Minhāj*, pp. 83 ff.
- ⁸⁷ Shawkāni, *Irshād*, pp. 206–7; Bajī, *Minhāj*, pp. 47–8. See 'Ādil Fākhūrī, *Al-Risāla al-ramziya fi usūl al-fiqh* [The Symbolic Treatise in the Principles of Jurisprudence], Beirut, 1978, pp. 29–30.
- ⁸⁸ The reader is referred to the rigorous work of Hammū Naqārī, *Al-Manhajīya al-usūliya wa'l mantiq al-Yūnānī min khilāl Abī Hāmid al-Ghazālī wa Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taimīya* [Jurisprudential Method and Greek Logic with Ghazālī and Ibn Taimīya], Casablanca, 1991, ch. 4. For a detailed account of 'illa, see Sālim Yafūt, *Hafrīyāt al-ma 'rifa al-'Arabiya al-'Islāmīya. Al-Ta 'līl al-fiqhī* [Archaeology of Arab-Islamic Knowledge], Beirut, 1990.
- ⁸⁹ Āmidī, *Ihkām*, vol. 1, pp. 7–8; Baidāwī, *Minhāj*, pp. 78, 82–3; Ibn Rushd, *Al-Muqaddimāt al-mumahhidāt*, p. 24.
- ⁹⁰ Ghazālī, *Mihakk al-nazar fi'l-mantiq* [The Criterion of Logic], ed. Badr al-Dīn Na'sānī and Mustafā Qabbānī, Cairo, n.d., p. 33.
- ⁹¹ See particularly Naqārī, *Al-Manhajīya al-usūliya*, pp. 177 ff., 187–9, 206 ff.; and Wael B. Hallaq, "Logic, Formal Arguments and Formalization of Arguments in Sunni Jurisprudence," *Arabica* 37 (1990), pp. 315–58. For Ghazālī's terminological transformation of Aristotelian logic for legal purposes, see Ghazālī, *Mihakk*, pp. 33 ff.; and idem, *Mi'yār al-'ilm* [The Measure of Knowledge], ed. Sulaymān Dunyā, Cairo, 1961, pp. 243 ff. The most systematic such transformation is of course that of Ibn Hazm, *Al-Taqrīb li-hadd al-mantiq bi-l alfāz al-'āmmīya wa'l-amthila al-fiqhīya* [Rendering Accessible Terms of the Logic], ed. Ishān 'Abbās, Beirut, 1959.
- ⁹² Ghazālī, *Mi'yār*, pp. 161, 163, 193 ff. Naqārī, *Al-Manhajīya al-usūliya*, pp. 181–3.
- ⁹³ Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Shifa' : Al-Mantiq 4 (Al-Qiyās)* [The Book of Healing: Logic 4 (The Syllogism)], ed. Sa 'id Ziyāda, Cairo, 1964, pp. 575–7, 579.
- ⁹⁴ Ibn Taymīya, *Naqd al-mantiq* [Refutation of Logic], ed. Muḥammad Hamza and Muḥammad al-Fiqī, Cairo, 1951, pp. 165–6, 200–1; idem, *Al-Radd 'alā al-mantiqīyīn* [Responses to the Logicians], Lahore, 1978, pp. 115–20. See also Naqārī, *Al-Manhajīya al-usūliya*, pp. 197–9, 200–5, 223.
- ⁹⁵ Ghazālī, *Mi 'yār*, pp. 170–3, 202; idem, *Maqāsid al-falāsifa* [The Aims of the Philosophers], ed. Sulaymān Dunyā, Cairo, 1961, pp. 90, 91 ff.; Khwarizmī, *Maḥāṭih al-'ulūm* [Keys to the Sciences], ed. G. van Vloten, Leiden, 1968, p. 9.
- ⁹⁶ There is a tendency in modern New Rhetoric to infer logic itself from analogy. See W. Sacksteder, "Analogy: Justification for Logic," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 12 (1979), pp. 27–9 and *passim*.
- ⁹⁷ Al-Jurjānī, *Asrār al-balāgha* [The Secrets of Eloquence], ed. Muḥammad Rashīd Ridā, Beirut, 1978, pp. 79–80.
- ⁹⁸ M.-J. Borel, J.-B. Grize, and D. Miéville, *Essai de logique naturelle (Sciences pour la Communication 4)* Bern, 1983, pp. 154–5.
- ⁹⁹ Ch. Perelman, *Logique juridique: Nouvelle rhétorique*, Paris, 1976, para. 8.

- ¹⁰⁰ Of the vast literature, the reader is particularly referred to the fine analyses of Peter Schofer and Donald Rice, "Metaphor, Metonymy and Synechdoche Revis(it)ed," *Semiotica* 21/1–2 (1977), pp. 121–49.
- ¹⁰¹ Borel et al., *Logique naturelle*, pp. 20, 25, and ch. 1, *passim*.
- ¹⁰² Perelman, *Logique juridique*, para. 6.
- ¹⁰³ Cf. Schofer and Rice, "Metaphor," pp. 130–1.
- ¹⁰⁴ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, London, 1982, p. 11.
- ¹⁰⁵ Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London, 1974, pp. 17, 21, 25 ff. This is a rigorous reading of the unreflected and the impressionistic comments often made on the "symbolist attitude" prevalent in the European Middle Ages: for instance, Jan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, trans. F. Hopman, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 195; and Aaron Gurevich, "The Representation of Property during the High Middle Ages," *Economy and Society* 6 (1977), p. 11.
- ¹⁰⁶ For example, Louis Gardet, "La dialectique en morphologie et logique arabes," in *L'ambivalence dans la culture arabe*, ed. Jacques Berque et al., Paris, 1967, p. 131.
- ¹⁰⁷ Robert Brunschvig, "Le système de la preuve en droit musulman," *Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin* 18 (1963), pp. 170, 173, 175.
- ¹⁰⁸ For instance: Chafik Chehata, "Logique juridique et droit musulman," *Studia Islamica* 23 (1965), pp. 16–7; idem, "L'Ikhtilaf et la conception musulmane du droit," in Berque et al., *L'ambivalence dans la culture arabe*, 259–63; Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 171–7.
- ¹⁰⁹ Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 25–8, 152.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 152, 160–1.
- ¹¹¹ Ibn al-Arthir, *Kāmil*, vol. 1, p. 59; Mas'ūdī, *Akbar*, p. 78; Qiftī, *Tārīkh al-hukamā'* [History of Philosophers and Physicians], ed. J. Lippert, Leipzig, 1903, p. 1; Mubashshir Ibn Fātik, *Mukhtār al-hikam wa mahāsin al-kalim* [Choice Wisdom and Good Proverbs], ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, Beirut, 1980, p. 10; Wahb Ibn Munabbih, *Kitāb al-Tijān fī mulūk Himyar* [Book of Crowns on the Kings of Himyar], Sanaa, 1979, pp. 29–30.
- ¹¹² Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 159–60; Roger Arnaldez, "L'Histoire de la pensée grecque vue par les Arabes," *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 72/3 (1978), pp. 117–68; Jean Jovilet, "L'idée de la sagesse et sa fonction dans la philosophie des 4 et 5 siècles," *Arab Sciences and Philosophy* 1 (1991), pp. 31–65; Qiftī, *Tārīkh*, p. 29; Nadīm, *Al-Fihrist* [The Index], ed. Ridā Tajaddud, Beirut [1971], pp. 303–4.
- ¹¹³ Jolivet, "L'idée de la sagesse," pp. 61–2.
- ¹¹⁴ Jacques Lenoble and Francois Ost, *Droit, mythe et raison: Essai sur la dérive mytho-logique de la rationalité juridique*, Bruxelles, 1980, pp. 5, 173–6, 218.
- ¹¹⁵ Jacques Berque, *Essai sur le méthode juridique maghrébine*, Rabat, 1944, p. 21.
- ¹¹⁶ Naqārī, *Al-Manhajīya al-usūliya*, pp. 10, 29–31.
- ¹¹⁷ Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, p. 227.
- ¹¹⁸ Pierre Legendre, *L'amour du censeur: Essai sur l'ordre dogmatique*, Paris, 1974, p. 109; and cf. pp. 82, 86–7, 90.

- ¹¹⁹ Howard Eilberg-Schwarz, "Myth, Inference, and the Relativism of Reason: An Argument from the History of Judaism," in *Myth and Philosophy*, ed. Frank Reynolds and David Tracy, Albany, 1990, pp. 251 ff.
- ¹²⁰ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. W. R. Trask, Princeton, 1968, p. 17.
- ¹²¹ Todorov, *Symbolisme et interpretation*, p. 104.
- ¹²² See Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 150 ff.
- ¹²³ Cf. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice, London and Beverly Hills, 1977, para. 3, gloss. 2. For these institutional underpinnings in Arab-Islamic culture, see Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 155 ff., 223 ff.
- ¹²⁴ Legendre, *L'amour du censeur*, pp. 34–6.
- ¹²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, "Genèse et structure du champ religieux," *Revue Francaise de Sociologie* 12 (1971), pp. 302–3.
- ¹²⁶ Legendre, *L'amour du censeur*, p. 109.
- ¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 111–6.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 78; Lenoble and Ost, *Droit, mythe et raison*, p. 230.
- ¹²⁹ I regard the dispute over the primacy of the one over the other to be meaningless, as was shown half a century ago: Clyde Kluckhohn, "Myths and Rituals: A General Theory," *Harvard Theological Review* 35 (1942), pp. 45–56.
- ¹³⁰ Cf. Walter Burkert, *Strucure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979, p. 6. For some elementary possibilities open to students of early Islamic narratives, see Albrecht Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung*, Bonn, 1973. See al-Azmeh, *Al-Kitāba al-tārīkhīya*, ch. 2.
- ¹³¹ Hedwig Konrad, *Etude sur la métaphore*, Paris, 1939, p. 91, quoted in Paul Ricoeur, *The Order of Metaphor*, trans. R. Cserny et al., London, 1978, p. 107.
- ¹³² Louis Gernet, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece*, trans. John Hamilton and Blaise Nagy, Baltimore, 1981, pp. 225–6.
- ¹³³ Cf. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, pp. 101, 104, 111.
- ¹³⁴ Thus it is unjustified to regard seriality and "participation" as excluding one another, as with Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver, Notre Dame and London, 1969, pp. 331–3.
- ¹³⁵ Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, London, 1966, pp. 20–1.
- ¹³⁶ Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution*, pp. 121–8, 131, 142, 148. I do not adhere to the author's apparent contentions concerning the full primacy of fantasy.
- ¹³⁷ On this institution—the denial of whose existence, albeit sociologically absurd, is one constant trope in modern scholarship—see Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 211 ff.
- ¹³⁸ See Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Islamic Legal Theory and the Appropriation of Reality," in *Islamic Law: Social and Historical Contexts*, ed. Aziz Al-Azmeh, London,

- 1988, pp. 258–60. For a particularly clear general exposition, see Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, *I'lām al-muwaqqi' in 'an rabb al-'ālamīn*, ed. Tāhā Sa'd, Beirut, n.d., pp. 339–42.
- ¹³⁹ For some outrageous, presumably hypothetical examples: Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, *I'lām*, vol. 3, p. 175.
- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 335–6; and Avram L. Udovitch, *Partnership and Profit in Medieval Islam*, Princeton, 1970, pp. 251–4, 258. See also Maxime Rodinson, *Islam et capitalisme*, Paris, 1966.
- ¹⁴¹ Bājī, *Al-Minhāj*, para. 19, pp. 58 ff., 500 ff.
- ¹⁴² Shātībī, *Muwāfaqāt*, vol. 1, pp. 1–17, 43–5, vol. 3, pp. 78–84.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 185.
- ¹⁴⁴ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 4–6 and *passim*. This formulation is first attested in Ghazālī, *Mustasfā*, vol. 1, p. 286.
- ¹⁴⁵ Shātībī, *Muwāfaqāt*, vol. 2, pp. 220–1.
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid., vol. 4, pp. 34–8; and idem, *I'tisām*, vol. 2, pp. 136–9.
- ¹⁴⁷ Shātībī, *I'tisām*, vol. 1, p. 46.
- ¹⁴⁸ Shātībī, *Muwāfaqāt*, vol. 3, pp. 81–2.
- ¹⁴⁹ Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication, the Logic by which Symbols Are Connected: An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology*, Cambridge, 1976, p. 31.

CHAPTER 4

The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism

By referring to the Muslim Canon in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, it is my intention to underline the specific character of the perspective I wish to cast in this essay upon the Koran and the canonical texts that complement it. It is primarily an historical perspective, insensitive to the mythological accounts one normally encounters with respect to the histories of significant events and times—historical events, often construed as born virtually complete and pristine.

The historical accounts subsequent to these events—for example, the “Greek Miracle” on the Event of the Koran—are perceived as being either developments or degenerations of this original event, with no temporal densities or specific gravities of their own. I should instead like to emphasize the non-homogeneity of history, including Muslim history, the relentless liability of history, including that of the Koranic text, to breaks, developments, and consequential changes. The Koran was born at a specific point in time: in Late Antiquity with its pagan, Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian religions and the proliferation in Arabia, Syria, and Palestine of Judaeo-Christian sects, with cultural traditions, cults, and rhetorical conventions. Muhammad himself was born not long after Justinian’s reign in an area limitrophic to Byzantium. The crystallization of the Koranic text and the cognitive and cultural forms which are now recognizably Muslim were not pre-existent, but took place in the fullness of time and in full view over many centuries. This process, with the crystallization of Koranic sciences, exegeses, and social purposes, made way—among very many other developments and historical movements of oecumenical import—to the Muslim Middle Ages, to classical Islam—from the eleventh century onwards.

Thus, in mentioning Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, I do not intend to introduce certain historiographical theses which I hold and might be prepared to defend on another occasion, but simply to under-

line the salience of time to my topic, namely, the Muslim canon in relation to history and utility. A canon is nothing if not text canonized and re-canonized over time; a development over the centuries that saw the transformation of textual fragments and codices, and of real or spurious oral traditions relating to Muhammad and his time, into a stable canonical repertoire. We cannot assume that all the terms in the most ancient of these textual fragments kept their original associations or referents. The real history of this transformation is obscure, as we shall see. But over centuries it became recognizably canonical in structure and utility, premised on a virtual genealogical and typological history, like all canonical material in the monotheistic religions.

From this perspective and indeed from many others, I have always been struck by the virtual absence of Islamic materials in general discussions of the history of religions, pagan or monotheistic. A reading of the Works of Mircea Eliade, for instance, would reveal only the most perfunctory acquaintance with and occasional use of Muslim materials. More recently, Assmann's work on canonization evinces no interest in using the very considerable Muslim canonical materials for the construction of his broad theses. A wonderful literary-critical study of the Bible contrastively notes the supposed simplicity of the Koran, asserted *a priori* as a *topos*, and affirms the relative fruitlessness of literary-critical study to it.¹

There are many reasons for this. One need not mention them all, but one must refer to the matter of exoticism, which regards Muslim materials as somewhat radically other and incommensurable, not least to the fantastic claims made for a Judeo-Christian Tradition constitutive of "the West" along a very strange itinerary from Athens through Magdeburg and Aachen to Paris and on to the Gulf war. I propose that this Judeo-Christian claim to a Tradition is fantastic because it is grounded far more in biblical typology than in serious historical continuity. Such a continuity is only discernible in the small Judeo-Christian sects such as the Ebionites, which seem to have had some formative influence on the Arabian palaeo-Muslim milieu from which Muhammad emerged.² Another factor in the apparent irrelevance of Muslim materials for the comparative history of religions is the quality of much orientalist material available. In general and with only a few notable exceptions, this material is either far too philologically technical and detailed in its approach and furtive in its conclusions, or else conceptually schematic. In both cases, it is grist to the mill of exoticism.

Textual history and canonicity

I do not have the time to pursue this argument now, and I will simply preface my remarks on the Muslim canon in relation to utility and historicity by stressing that the history of this textual corpus is obscure. The historical and historiographical problems to which it gives rise are immense and have not been consequentially treated in general presentations of the field. Some basic elements for such an undertaking are still lacking. And this obscurity is willingly admitted by modern scholarship. Standard accounts state unambiguously that the history of the Koranic text is yet to be written, and that, compared to other philological disciplines, Koranic studies are still in their infancy and, quite apart from hypotheses, can provide no more than a collection of isolated detailed results. In terms of its history of emergence, the Koran stands “isolated like a rock jutting forth from a desolate sea”; its investigation could be compared to attempting to study the emergence of the Gospels solely from Egyptian papyri and Antiochene inscriptions.³

Much systematic study which has been done within these research areas has, with some very notable exceptions, been generally tendentious, reductive, and in its own way fanciful; but it also belatedly introduced into the field, however episodically and unevenly, the merits of form-critical study of the text.⁴ I refer to a recent attempt to date the Koranic text some two centuries after its traditional datation; like much of Western literature on the subject, this attempt is blighted by a crude conception of textual invention, which has come to function as a *topos* in Western scholarship on early Muslim writings for a century now. There was certainly invention, as was widely recognized by medieval Muslim scholarship, but more importantly, there was also textual modification and different redactions. But these modifications obey systematic rules, including textual rules of semantic modification, topological personalization, schematization, telescoping, and projection;⁵ they cannot be regarded as an interplay of free-floating moral turpitude and barbarous disregard for fact. Another recent attempt to date the Koranic redaction to the Muhammadan era as the work of the Prophet himself depends in turn on a rather crude notion that later jurists fabricated stories to the contrary, in order to justify various stands taken at the time of fabrication.⁶ And, crucially, although scholars question the reliability of early Muslim materials, they have “closed their eyes” to this questionable reliability, like their medieval predecessors, and used it uncritically and extensively.⁷

It is therefore not surprising that, *grosso modo*, scholarly consensus has tended to accept, with slight modification, the traditional medieval Muslim narrative about the genesis of the Koranic text, despite the critical and sometimes hypercritical regard with which the sources for this narrative are regarded—indeed, one can arguably construct variant and highly divergent narratives and histories of composition from these same sources.⁸ What modern scholarship does not note often enough or with much consequence is the fact that these traditional Arabic sources cite many varieties of traditions that not only disturb the standard narrative, but could potentially subvert it. This inattention in Western scholarship is due to a considerable extent to the unwillingness and often the inability of scholars to use the rich variety of medieval scholarship or to read modern scholarship in Arabic.

With regard to questions of dating the Koran, it is true that the Koranic text does not reflect the afterglow of the Arab conquests,⁹ and that this, among other things, argues for an early datation. But this cannot be construed as confirmation of the supposition, usually regarded as axiomatic, that it constituted Revelation, that is, Muhammadan utterance regarded as the *ipsissima verba Dei*. Among the arguments against this supposition is the fact that it has no sufficient justification in the Koranic text itself which, despite theological and exegetical efforts, remains polyphonic, involving as speakers God, Gabriel (once only, at Koran ii:97), Muhammad, and other, lesser beings, most particularly ‘Umar b. Al-Khattāb.¹⁰ In addition, its elements seem to a considerable extent to have been assembled during the time of the Medinan caliphate (632–61) or shortly thereafter. Many Koranic codices were in circulation at this time, some were destroyed, and some fragments remain in other, non-canonical sources, particularly the corpus of Muhammadan *logia*, the *hadīth*.¹¹ And indeed, the special variety of prophetic utterances which can be derived from Revelation, called *hadīth qudsī*, which consists of sayings attributed to God by Muhammad but not included in the Koran leads one to conclude that Koranic composition is a far more complex process than is usually supposed,¹² and that the polyphony of the text needs to be very deliberately addressed in investigating this matter.

The differences—stylistic, compositional, epigraphic and otherwise—between the Koranic recensions which were generally available to Muslims were considerable, until these were reduced to the seven that were eventually recognized as canonical on the basis of appeal to consensus by Ibn Mujāhid (d. 936). Indeed, the fact that various Koranic readings were canonized or discarded as uncanonical in the

tenth century may be regarded as a departure from an *Urtext*, but this phenomenon may equally justifiably be seen to reflect the lack of such an urtextual canon.¹³ In addition, the doctrinal content of the text is rather diverse: it reflects a plurality of conceptions of divinity and the marks of a movement from one such conception to another.¹⁴ For example, chronologically earlier textual parts of the Koran refer, quite simply and in the tradition of Near Eastern paganism, to Muhammad's Lord (*rabb*), that is, to Muhammad's tutelary deity. This reference was succeeded by the adherence to a deity called al-Rahmān, who was later to be conjoined with Allāh in supremacy. The term Al-Rahmān was associated with astral deities worshipped in Mecca as well as elsewhere (under slightly different names) and with the God of Arabian Christians. Al-Rahmān may also have been associated with the Black Stone of the Ka'ba at Mecca, within which resided another deity, Hubal. The Ka'ba had earlier equivalents in the Black Stone at Hims in Syria (Emessa to the Romans, from whence the Black Stone of the Elagabalus cult in Rome can be traced). Late Antiquity is full of these kinds of associations, but I will resist the temptation to continue in this vein. I will return to the Koran, where Allāh, in later passages, came to absorb these and other names and epithets as his own names and "attributes," from which a very elaborate theology was later constructed in terms of essences and accidents. All these are matters widely recognized, but they have not dented the confidence in the easy solution of accepting the medieval narrative of origins.

So often in modern Koranic scholarship we find crucial matters identified and indicated, sometimes asserted, without systematic consequences being drawn from them. Another such crucial topic, that of the state of the Arabic language ca. 550–650. There are also such decisive matters as the relation between liturgical, cultic, and other aspects of the text,¹⁵ between the recitation (literally: Koran) and its textual redaction called *al-mushaf*, and indeed between the different terms with which the Koran refers to itself (*Qur'ān*, *Kitāb*, *Tanzīl*, *Furqān*, *Dhikr*), which are often treated without clear justification as being synonymous.¹⁶ Other crucial matters yet to be investigated are those pertaining to oral transmission and the history and status of writing at the relevant times and places.¹⁷ The ambient religious, mythological, doctrinal, and cultic milieu is little understood and indeed little known. The nineteenth-century pioneering work of Julius Wellhausen (*Reste arabischen Heidentums*, 1887) whose contribution to the historical study of the Old Testament is far better known and was indeed epoch-making, has been amplified,¹⁸ and there are studies of matters of detail and

some suggestive contemporary Arab research which unfortunately uses only literary sources and has not addressed properly archaeological and other material evidence.¹⁹

The textual study of the Koran has been somewhat lethargic, despite the existence of very rich medieval material on its semantical and other aspects of composition, not to speak of modern methods of linguistic and discourse analysis, much of which is beyond the attention span of some modern orientalist scholarship. There has been little conceptual improvement on the pioneering textual efforts of Theodor Nöldeke nearly a century and a half ago, when he published his *Geschichte des Korans*, even though much additional material has been discovered.²⁰ This is recognized in modern scholarship, and reveals the immense inner compositional and other complexities of the Book,²¹ but is not systematically utilized. Indeed, as with the Bible, the matter rests with questioning the notion of an author. Once the notion of an author is abandoned, textual unities of different kinds will emerge:²² unities beyond those of Koranic *sūras* rearranged in the putative chronological order of their composition. For example, unities of oaths, doxologies, mantic utterances, parables, mythological and legendary material, some in the form of stories of prophets and times past, levitical and halakhic dicta, apocalyptic threats and warnings, eschatological annunciations and promises.²³ The recent shift of scholarly preference to “non-referential history,” partly as consequence of the apparent historical indeterminacy of crucial aspects of the Koranic text, and partly flavored by the scholarly tastes of today, has not enhanced matters much. For although a perspective of the Koranic text and early Muhammadan biographies as reflecting a “state of mind” can in itself be very interesting indeed, and can illuminate referential history if undertaken with sufficient anthropological and historiographic sophistication beyond the requirements of philology, this has so far produced only very slight results, reflecting perhaps the overall underdevelopment of Islamic studies.²⁴

Modern scholarship therefore, with notable exceptions, shares with medieval Muslim scholarship broadly and implicitly the assumption of a *textus receptus* fully formed, a text which is regarded ahistorically for purposes other than those of the deliberate study of the Koran; namely, for the instrumental processing of Koranic materials.²⁵ I have indicated that the history of Koranic composition is obscure, as was the further development of the text, until the Ibn Mujāhid’s seven recensions come to be regarded as exclusively canonical. Yet, the social, cultural, and political conditions for the success of his seven recen-

sions and for their almost universal and rapid acceptance in the tenth century is neither properly charted nor understood. In fact, it was not until the Cairo edition of 1924, as a result, among other things, of the requirements of a printed text, that an integral text of the Koran could claim *ne varietur* status; although this itself was based on oral transmission and late *qirā'āt* phonetic literature concerning one of Ibn Mujāhid's recensions (the so-called 'Āsim in the tradition of Hafs recension), rather than being an edition of an ancient text, although two groups are currently gathering materials for such an edition.²⁶ These are, of course, facts that reinforce the status of the Koran as a living canon rather than the object of research, with vast areas of presence beyond the written word.

In other words, with the absence of a proper study of canonization, I propose that we turn from the terrain of antiquarianism and concentrate on the properly historical and structural matter of canonicity, which stands in a special relationship to history and historicity. For canonicity is related more immediately to the authority maintaining and interpreting the canon, and not the raw canon. The raw canon is meaningless if shorn of the authority that maintains its preeminence and indeed its canonicity over time. The Koran is at once holy text for ritual recitation and a canonical text to be interpreted and otherwise used discursively. It is a text which, in its interpretation, is to be repeated ritually,²⁷ while at the same time providing grounds for dogmatic, legal, and ethical thought and exemplarity. The Koran is also naturally utilized for oaths, and for talismanic and other magical purposes for the good of believers in this world and the next.²⁸

The historical nature of the canonical text as a genealogical charter of rectitude demands a status beyond history, figuring as a vantage point from which chronometric time becomes neutralized, and in which the holy text places itself along a prior continuum of eternity instantiated in the rhythms of a *Heilsgeschichte*.²⁹ The necessary condition for this to be possible is that the actual historical nature of the canon should devolve to an incontestable assertion of an internal unity and homogeneity, a unity and homogeneity which are in fact virtual. This was signified in the above discussion by the search for a definitively ascertainable authorship by modern scholars, and the assertion of divine authorship and verbatim prophetic transmission by medieval divines. This presumption of unity, of course, works towards control of the polysemy of the text.³⁰ It is allied to a conception of "clôture livresque,"³¹ whose only possible instrument is the non-textual, socio-cultural authority behind commentary and interpretation, whether this authority

be singular, plural, or divided. These are textual procedures which figure as the simulated representation of the commentatorial and interpretative authority external to the text.³² Hence, the decisive salience of censorship in these matters, the strict delimitation of textual boundaries, authorities, rationalities, and interpretability which is defined, in the case of the Koran, by its divine provenance, and which assures a ceremonial of textual repetition with a pronouncedly obsessional character, which is also depictive of other canonical texts.³³

The “clôture livresque” to which I have referred is not absolute: the text of the Koran is, within the limits to its repertoire, variable. The Muslim canon, like the Jewish one, extends beyond the text of the divine *logos* to encompass a corpus of prophetic *logia* called the *hadīth*, in addition to a correlative holy of narratives of prophetic actions which overdetermine the vast majority of the Koranic text. The latter narratives also have a complex, obscure, and controverted history which, in the ninth century (in the case of Sunnism), was reduced to six collections on parity in terms of authoritative veracity. One of these collections, the *Sahīh* of Bukhārī (d. 870) was the *primus inter pares*, habitually described as “the truest of Books after God’s Book.” Bukhārī had canonized slightly more than 6,000 narratives out of the several hundred thousand which are said to have been available to him. As with Ibn Mujāhid’s Koranic efforts, the reason why this particular book achieved such authority, and indeed how and why the six compilations in question came to be regarded as canonical, is a subject which has not yet been researched, nor brought in connection with the patronage, authority, and networks of the Vizier Ibn Muqla, the patron of Ibn Mujāhid. Another interesting point that has so far not been addressed at all in scholarship is the seemingly peculiar fact that the *hadīth* was canonized before the Koran. This fact should be addressed in relation to the development of dogmatics and of *fiqh*. This would be an important vantage point from which one could conceptually review the matter of canonicity in its entirety. In addition to this canonical *hadīth*, there is also a much vaster body of auxiliary *hadīth* of quasi-canonical status which performs the functions similar to materials contained within the six canonical collections. These writings function as a dogmatic supplement to the Koran, and as a source of material for the explication, supplementation, and amplification of Koranic material pertaining to legal, ethical, political, devotional, eschatological, and other matters. No study has been made of the relation between this auxiliary body of what we might term “apocrypha” (which is nevertheless often treated as if it were canonical) and the properly canonized narratives which

constitute the canon of *hadīth* contained within the six collections. In all cases, the conceptual distinction between original text and the historical accumulation of interpretive activity is not, for practical purposes, operative; these are functionally equivalent.³⁴

The closure I speak of is therefore not so much an absolute closure of textual amplitude as much as of commentatorial and interpretative access, and of the agency of transmission, that is, of Tradition, a matter to which my attention will turn later. Suffice it to say now that this crucial liberation of vatic authority from predetermined textual choices is a common phenomenon in the history of religions. It takes on perhaps its purest form in Classical Brahminism. The Vedas, before the age of printing, were regarded as canonical speech, not canonical text. They were defined more by the social and cultural authority of the speakers than by philological limitations of content, and were inseparable from ritual action, although this does not necessarily imply—nor preclude—textual alteration over time.³⁵ For their part, the Mishnah and Talmud are recorded in Rabbinical Judaism as extensions of the Torah, as Oral Revelation slowly recorded in direct continuity with Mosaic prophecy. And it has indeed been maintained that the written text of the Koran was, in practice, secondary, not standing apart from its variant phonetic readings, so that the written text was an *aide-mémoire* rather than a documentary text existing apart from memorization and oral delivery. This assertion is both true and not fully true, but this is another matter.³⁶

For now, it is important first to characterize the medieval Muslim conception of this canonical material in technical terms, and quite apart from doctrinal consideration. In all cases, both the Koran and the *hadīth* are texts grounded in specific lines of transmission which authenticate their content and constitute them as authentic textual traditions. The Koranic variants all have their lines of transmission. Ultimately, they all depend for the veracity of their entire content on extra-Koranic criteria and the integrity of divine utterance—we have seen that the latter is directly indicated in some but not all of the Koranic verses. The implicit assumption of Muhammadan impeccability is not an invariant theory in Muslim prophetology, which emphasizes Muhammad's humanity. The ultimate guarantor of the integrity of transmission is the principle of consensus (*ijmā'*), which ratifies this veracity, and which is itself self-ratifying. The principle of consensus is not grounded in some rational or natural deduction, but by a consensus regarding its self-constitution.³⁷ Medieval Muslim sources have materials for the definition of tradition of great salience to the study of the functions

and structures of traditional discourse overall. It is a cardinal principle of medieval Sunnite Muslim scholarship, built upon a consensually authenticated *hadīth*, that consensus is inerrant and infallible—again, the history of this notion is yet to be properly researched.

The textual nature of the Koran is diverse. It contains admonitions, prohibitions, and other performative statements, in addition to narratives (*akhbār*, sg. *khābar*). The *hadīth*, however, is composed exclusively of narratives, even though these may relate performative statements attributed to the Prophet. A *hadīth* takes the form of a narrative to which are added one or more *isnād*, *catenae*, an ideally continuous chain of transmitters going back to the original witness who narrates at first hand an act of the Prophet, including speech-acts. Unlike the performative and indubitable narratives of the Koran, the narratives of *hadīth* are subject to the same highly technical criteria of verification as any other type of *khābar*³⁸ would be, and are not always able to be ratified by recourse to simple reference to consensus. Ratification—as with the canonization efforts of Bukhārī and the other authors of the Six Books—took place, in cases of controversy, by means of a particular branch of historical study. This study examined the plausibility of *isnād* with reference to its direct links with a reliable first narrator and to the reliability of each narrator in the chain of transmission. The highest form of veracity is that which characterizes a *hadīth* called concordant (*mutawātir*), in which different chains regarded as reliable confirm each other mutually to such an extent that one must rule out the possibility of a compact of mendacity.

Apart from the technical criteria of canonical veracity, medieval Muslim scholars were quite aware of what may be described as the virtual character of veracity ascribed to the extra-Koranic canon. The celebrated polymath Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) asserted that the narratives of prophetic action and speech which Bukhārī and the other five had canonized were in fact *hadīth* narratives that had become active traditions. In other words, they were narratives with legal effect,³⁹ regardless of any judgments concerning their historicity, a matter to which we shall return presently. Somewhat earlier, the Damascene jurist Subkī (d. 1369+) had counseled against too rigorous a pursuit of *isnād* criticism on the grounds that this would lead to the disqualification of a great number of authorities which had been accepted by consensus.⁴⁰ Earlier still, in central Iran, the great theologian Fakhr ad-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209) asserted it to be necessary knowledge that the text of Prophetic pronouncements in the *hadīth* could not correspond to the actual words uttered. Such pronouncements, he said, were attributed to the

Prophet many decades after they had been ostensibly made, and their narrators, the Prophet's Companions, were neither infallible nor above strife and mutual hostility and all that was entailed by such. Thus, Bukhārī and other compilers of *hadīth* were well-meaning divines who exerted themselves as much as they could, but it could not be assumed that they were clairvoyant.⁴¹ In a discussion of the means for deciding which of two contradictory *hadīth* narratives was likely to be most accurate if both narratives had equally strong chains of transmission, the historian and *hadīth* scholar al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī (d. 1071) had already stated that he preferred the weighting of such narratives in such a manner as to reinforce the practices and beliefs that were already a matter of consensus.⁴²

All these statements—and others that could also be adduced—indicate a clear awareness that the status of canonicity is established by means more complex than cognitive, technical, historical investigation of the relevant texts and other discursive operations. Canonicity was a status conferred upon evolving traditions by a process of selection and crystallization which, in the case of Islam, is historically obscure except in some of its details. The fact that prudence and measure were always enjoined, and that critics of chains of transmission were urged never to cross the line dividing assessment from defamation, even if a transmitted narrative were to be manifestly mendacious,⁴³ was not an indicator of moral laxity or of disregard to technical rigor. Rather, it reflects the invariable mechanisms of tradition construction. In fact, the level of technical sophistication was quite high, and the formal procedures of *hadīth* criticism were systematically elaborated.⁴⁴ Although the results were often contradictory, this tallied with the probabilistic epistemology employed by the vast majority of medieval Sunnite divines.⁴⁵ The disjunction between consensus over veracity, on the one hand, and the assertion of virtual authenticity compounded with the probabilistic nature of knowledge, on the other, is closely related to mutual recognition by various Muslim legal and certain theological traditions, and to the institutional, formal, and social authority of scientific knowledge in the medieval history of Muslim lands.⁴⁶ It is also connected to the overbearing salience of canonical traditions that may in themselves be dubious. All this indicates the crucial relevance of criteria for the assessment of binding referentiality other than the cognitive. The *hadīth* was thus construed at an unapproachable distance of historical inscrutability; hence, it gained irreproachability, like the Koran. The corpus of *hadīth* is vast and internally inconsistent, but it has a sacral status nevertheless. There are indeed some doctrines,

equally controversial and telling, which deal with the legal interpretation and use of these two components of the canon. These doctrines allow the of *hadīth* to overrule the Koran in case of contradiction, based on grounds of the complex concept of *naskh*—*Aufhebung*. *Naskh* is the abrogation of one canonical text by another with which it is in contradiction. This abrogation, however, does not lead to the erasure of the letter of the abrogated text nor its removal from the canon, although this last option is also pertinent. Apparently, this concept of *naskh* was originally used in the case of Koranic verses which contradict one another, such as those pertaining to so-called temporary marriage and inheritance, the consumption of wine, and, last but by no means least, the so-called Satanic Verses.

The exquisitely versatile casuistry of these procedures is, in a rigorous sense, a procedure for transforming all traditional narratives contained in the canon into performative statements. This occurs in such a way that the Prophetic example related in the *hadīth* becomes a command on parity with the Koranic command. This operation is by no means exceptional. Both rest on a specific and extended sense of the *exemplum* and are unexceptional. The use of *exempla* in medieval Christendom is ubiquitous, as it was throughout pre-literate human history.⁴⁷ In Arabic letters, these exemplary types are termed ‘*ibar* (sg. ‘*ibra*) in historical and political literature, good example (*qudwa*, *uswa*) in ethics and moral behavior, and principle (*asl*) in the technical sense they acquire in jurisprudence and, with a different profile, in theology.

This same casuistry is likewise a mechanism for the maintenance of canonicity, and specifically, the canonicity of living Tradition—including practice—which had become textual corpus, ratified over the space of many generations and centuries by consensus. Like the *opinio communis doctorum* of the Latin Middle Ages, it is a self-ratifying authority which from the eleventh century onwards came to be institutionalized in an educational system which led to career itineraries premised on sultanlic patronage; this resulted in the institutional formation of the priestly class of Islam, the ‘*ulamā*, who performed devotional, legal, educational, and other functions. These gentlemen were consecrated by their knowledge and training, much like Protestant divines; what they mediated was knowledge, but also prophetic charisma and grace—all these matters are well presented in the writings of the ‘*ulamā*, from the eleventh century onwards. Prior to the consolidation of the ‘*ulamā* as a priestly sodality, the mechanisms for the exclusion of illicit knowledge or control over the unlicensed dissemination of Tradition was

undertaken by means more episodic, but no less cumulative for being so.⁴⁸ Let me add the cautionary statement that the social and cultural centrality of the *‘ulamā* should not be assumed *a priori*: this is a matter which differed with time and place, no less than modality of social and political action (see ch. 8 below).

Canonical pragmatics

The fundamental thrust of this casuistry is the construction of a stable and constant foundation of archetypes for which there was a utilitarian historical purpose; namely, the connection of law, dogma, social ethics, and personal morality to a common genealogy which was canonically grounded in irreducible authority. Both Koran and *hadīth* are used episodically in discourses of various kinds—political, legal, social, and others—in order to align the efforts and discourses made by the exegete into a pre-established corpus of truth.⁴⁹ But there is also a far more systematic context for the use of this canon. Thus, there was a vast corpus of legal epistemology that was elaborated from the eleventh century onwards which sought to construct, by complex hermeneutical means, a system whereby legal practice could be grounded in a systematic body of textual archetypes serving meta-legal purposes;⁵⁰ namely, retroactively confirming grounds of legal consensus which had arisen out of diverse historical circumstances as canonical tradition. This hermeneutics sought to relate a uniform genealogical epistemology to bodies of legal elaboration arising from prior local practices and traditions.

Koranic exegesis likewise was geared towards meta-Koranic sense, and sought to base its various senses in truth of various kinds, all of which were premised on a theory of the text’s communicative intention: theological and linguistic-rhetorical, as with Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), legal, as with Qurtubī (d. 1272), historical-salvational and legal, as with Tabarī (d. 923).⁵¹ In this last, perhaps even “canonical” exegesis, it is characteristic of the genre—and of traditionalist casuistics in general—that Tabarī habitually gives precedence in his interpretation of the Koranic lexicon and syntax to exegetical over linguistic traditions; where the two are concordant, he treats the latter as simply confirming the former,⁵² so that the lexical traditions of linguists merely confirm and do not establish the lexical traditions of the exegetes. The study of the Koran in terms of its textual logics and internal concatenations was rare, and the exegesis of Rīzī is one of the few was distinguished in this respect.⁵³ The great semantic study of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī

(d. 1078+) stands apart from all other studies of the Koran in constructing a prodigiously systematic theory of discourse and meaning whose scope goes far beyond its immediate object of study.⁵⁴

The one field in which the highly sophisticated techniques of historical verification were deployed consistently and in a fairly open way was in certain medieval Arabic studies of the Bible, particularly by the Andalusian Ibn Hazm (d. 1036).⁵⁵ Much of this study—from Ibn Hazm and others including the Jewish convert Samaw'al al-Maghribī (d. ca. 1174)⁵⁶—maintained among other things that Ezra (Ha-Sofer, or Ezra the Scribe) sought to discredit the Royal House of David in favor of priestly families in the late 5th century B.C., and that he did so by interpolating all manners of stories concerning fornication and other iniquities into biblical genealogies—a view that has an echo in modern Bible criticism. It was maintained, moreover, that the Pentateuch lacked a reliable tradition of transmission, on account of a history full of invasions and assaults that made this task improbable. And it was maintained that Jewish history saw recurrent lapses into idolatry and the killing of prophets, a circumstance not conducive to the production of reliable traditions. Their polemical intent notwithstanding, these studies seem in many respects to have paved the way—through the work of Abraham Ibn Ezra (d. 1164) and Spanish Jewish scholarship—to Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.⁵⁷ Spinoza praised specifically Ibn Ezra's critical remarks on Ezra the Scribe and on biblical composition in general.

It is noteworthy in this regard that Ibn Ezra's son Yitzak Ibn Ezra was, together with the above-mentioned Samaw'al, a member of the Baghdadian philosophical circle of Abu'l-Barakāt (d. 1164–5, known prior to his conversion to Islam as Nathaniel b. Eli). Some Jewish members of this circle converted to Islam, and freely used Bible criticism—based on criticism of *Isnād*, chains of transmitters—to the effect that the Pentateuch was not an original text, but one recorded by later redactors. It is also noteworthy that at more or less the same time Ibrahim Ibn Dāwūd in Spain used the Muslim conceptions of *hadīth* criticism to confirm the contrary; namely, not only that the Torah did possess direct and unmediated Mosaic and Divine origins, but that this is also true of the Talmud. In making this affirmation, he used the Talmudic term *qabbalah* to make a technical Jewish rendering of the Arabic terms *khavar*—narrative—and *hadīth*, which we have already encountered. His famous book, *Sefer ha-Qabbalaq*, written in Arabic (but preserved in a Hebrew translation only), was composed in response to Karaite polemic, but Muslim writings must be kept in perspective.⁵⁸

So also was the earlier history of the infusion of Rabbinical scholarship with Muslim historiographic and conceptual tools for traditionalism, most particularly as crystallized by Sa'id b. Ya'qūb al-Fayyūmī (d. 941/2), better known today as Saadya Gaon, and equally a formidable anti-Karaite polemicist. And to complete our indication of the coordinates of this matter, let us finally note that these same traditionalist tools were deployed by Ibn Dāwūd as by others to refute claims to the reliability of the New Testament. Along with many Muslim writers, Ibn Dāwūd maintained that the New Testament had no direct lineage of transmission, but was written at least three centuries after the death of Christ, as a fabrication of Constantine. Thus, the New Testament is apocryphal and not authenticated in relation to its putative origin. In sum, then, historical arguments were constructed to discredit the Pentateuch and the Gospels by the followers of these two scriptures, as well as by Muslims. These efforts emanated on the basis of the Muslim theory of *tahrīf* or tampering with the scriptures which should, according to Muslim typology, have revealed Muhammad to be the Paraclete, whose coming to the world had been foretold by Jesus in the Gospel of St. John.⁵⁹

Such is the ground of canonicity. In order for royal patronage or the *'ulamā* or the Rabbis to posit the authority which would allow them to claim to husband societies that they regarded as their own, a unity of provenance was postulated in terms of genealogy and of origin to be found in the canonical text, a genealogy the *'ulamā* claimed to have inherited from the Muhammadan apostolate of God taken over from previous prophecies and revelations. Canonicity presupposes a conception of history which is typological in structure; in the case of monotheism, they are the typologies of *Heilsgeschichte*. In order to assimilate the present to a typological time, myth of origin becomes an obligatory point of transit. And if this operation was, in medieval Catholicism, empowered by pontifical authority,⁶⁰ in the case of medieval Islam after the Caliphate, this transit was corporately empowered by and vested in the priestly class. Members of this class officiate the rhetorical similarity between typology and causality,⁶¹ regarding the Type whose existence in the canon is established and guarded by Tradition to be the unmediated, efficient, as well as primordial cause for matters possible today. Past and Present, Type and Figure, are related as exemplar and enactment. In other words, scientific procedures applied to the canon devolve to the mythological procedure of genealogical recommencement and the magical procedure of action at a distance; *logos* is the very form and discipline of *mythos*.

Typology, of course, is “a figure of speech that moves in time.”⁶² But it is also more than that. In terms of the meta-textual concerns of the canon proposed above, it presupposes a time that is inert; a chronometric continuum which is accentuated by significant events of a greater ontological weight on account its affiliation to eternity, such as successive appearances of prophecy or other moments of divine intervention, such as the Flood. It is a vast *longue durée* coterminous with time itself and anterior to it, derived from the Type and the re-enactments of the Type. Events and novelties that occur in the world can be shaped by the practical reason of the performative canon, in conformity with the textual Type to which they are assimilated.⁶³ The performative statement of the canonical text prefigures, as Type, the judgment or the conduct which re-enacts this inaugural act of rectitude and plenitude, divinely sanctioned and mediated by the knowledge of the ‘*ulamā*’.

In the field of jurisprudence which I will now utilize briefly as an illustration of active canonicity, this foundational Type takes the form of a performative statement in the canon. As was already mentioned above, this is called a principle, *asl*, from which specific legislation is to be derived. In this particular respect the canon becomes nomothetic discourse, and work on its textual material transposes it from the generally exemplary, salutary, and performative, to material of technical legal consequence; that is, to textual material scientifically elaborated by means of meta-legal purpose that we have already come across. The legislative and legal processes together have as their *raison d’être* the relation of consequent to precedent, of posterior to the necessarily and genealogically anterior, of figure to type, and, technically, of the *far’*, “branch” (= the specific judgment) to its ostensible principle, the *asl*, the statement of the canon, commanding, permitting, and prohibiting. The former is related to the latter by means of implementation which is construed in conformity either with its letter, such as obeying a particular command (for instance, not to kill unlawfully), or else by analogy with it (*qiyās*),⁶⁴ a concept of which there are very detailed and systematic elaborations. The para-logical copula connecting the text and its later analogy to make a specific judgment may indeed have rational grounds, such as the public interest served by the prohibition of murder, adultery, alcohol, or sedition. But this consideration from *ratio legis* was not regarded the only one available—in the mainstream Sunni theories of the legal order it was incidental to the fundamental impulse of analogy. This rested for them—from the occasionalist theological ground of absolute divine omnipotence, hence the divine capacity for arbitrariness which precluded the affirmation of theodicy—on the

basis of the argument that the analogical connective, or index of correlation (*'illa*), relating the canon to concrete legislation. Legislation thus becomes construed as a work of recuperation and re-enactment, of virtually ritual repetition.

Indeed, one particularly illustrious and influential theologian, jurist, pietist, and polymath, al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), declared the relation of the branch, *far'*, to the principle, the *asl*, to be one of submission, *idh'ān*.⁶⁵ This is because the means of transition between the one and the other is indexical, the *'illa*-cause being characterized normally as an *amāra*, index. Thus, it renders the two correlative, and the axis of this correlativity is the continuum between type and figure. Please note that my statements are based on works of legal hermeneutics, and not necessarily on the rulings of judges. The latter were in effect both freer and stricter, according to circumstances, highly innovative and accommodating of local conditions, balances of social forces, and changes in economic and social conditions. But legal hermeneutics—the highly elaborated discipline of *usūl al-fiqh*—sought to relate later rulings and practices to archetypal enactments in a systematic way. For this purpose, very complex semantic and rhetorical theories were elaborated.

There was indeed much use of the notion of human interest under various labels and with various profiles in Muslim jurisprudence. But this largely escaped mainstream theoretization in *usūl al-fiqh*, and was generally regarded as a legally admissible extra-legal principle of legislation. It was theoretically elaborated first by the Mu'tazilites and later by theorists such as Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) and, most consummately, the Granadan Shātibī (d. 1388).⁶⁶ The latter developed the most systematic statement of human interest in terms of the Muslim canon, a statement which was to remain without effect until the advent of modern Muslim reform. This reform acquiesced to the traditional juristic procedure, which practiced innovation while denying it, and which affirmed that legal evolution was to be undertaken in terms of continuity. After all, Muslim law was legal practice, and like law everywhere it had to fulfill social and economic functions, and not only imaginary ones. Be that as it may, the effect exercised by the *asl* upon the *far'* takes place at a distance, not only in time, but also across the distance which separates distinctive media, the one being textual and the other practical.

Going back to analogy, I have said that the causality implied here is virtual; it is typological, decreed and maintained by the authoritative voice of the keepers of the canon. Analogical connectives are established by various means. Some are based on similitude, others on con-

comitance; some are based on procedures pertaining to the interpretation of the canonical text as generalization and specification, implication and allusion, metaphor and synecdoche, and yet others are based on an appeal to human interest. But in all cases, stress is laid not on the transitive qualities of causes, but on the indexical character of the connective. One clear and simple example could perhaps be given from matters pertaining to drunkenness: that a drunkard should be whipped does not imply a necessary connection between drunkenness and the lash, but an indexical connection derived from textual command. The notion that scotch whisky and Tequila Sunrise should be illicit is derived from the fact that both are intoxicants, which are illicit because of textual command, and not because they cause loss of sobriety or of mind.

Legal inference is thus accomplished by the affirmation of such inference on grounds of similarity and typological repetition as asserted by the legislative authority of the *'ulamā*. This authority reads the later instance—the specific ruling—in the text of the principal as its repetition. It is a ritual celebration of a myth of origin; the canon is pronounced whenever present reality is seen as its figure, when the *far'* is denatured and inscribed into the non-chronometric rhythm of the origin, established in the canon, and then repeated in nomothetic and legal actions. Correlatively, the canon, in effect, is utilized as a series of disconnected portions, for it is the individual motifs from the canon that enter into the making of each inferential ritual. The result is primarily classificatory with pragmatic consequence, not cognitive: it is the affirmation of the islamicity or otherwise of specific acts in a vast space of filiation whose mainspring is the canonicity of the text. This text acts as a sign which mediates spheres of semiotic and non-semiotic reality, of the denatured and the natural, of the primary and principal and the branch. It works by absorbing the one into the other whose exclusive primacy is posited with reference to its typological originality and precedence, despite the continuum of similitude it constructs by its rhythms. The units of origin and re-enactment are thus both coextensive and co-intensive.⁶⁷ Every portion of the canon comes to stand for the whole and semiotically to stand for the rest; and the whole stands for its several parts, in a synecdochal mutuality of particularization and generalization. In the later practice of fundamentalist politics which are contemporary with us today, the singular acts, such as primitive punitive regimes, stand emblematically in a rigorous sense for the accomplishment of rectitude in general; emblems being here defined as “images that refuse to be accepted as representations of mere things but demand to be interpreted as vehicles of concepts.”⁶⁸

It is thus that the trans-historical collectivity called Islam is generated and maintained: the assimilation of specific histories to the canon, an assimilation itself authorized and maintained by the priestly-legal institution.⁶⁹ And it is thus that the *ratio* of canonization, of critical gentleness towards the sources, can be read by the scholar of today. The canon contains the truth or its other normative and aesthetic equivalents, and the contemporary sense which is made of particular times and places—legal, moral, political, ethical, cognitive sense that we get from exegeses, glosses, and commentaries—is inscribed into the register of this canonical truth, having been pre-established the moment it is pronounced by its licensing and authenticating authority. This is why the study of the Koran and *hadīth* by medieval Muslim divines was a study not so much *of* the text as *with* the text. The ultimate historical science concerning the Koran—the Koranic discipline of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, which purports to study the circumstances for the revelation of each Koranic verse in order to scrutinize matters of its status as a general, particular, metaphorical or other type of statement—was a quasi-historical discipline. This is due to the fact that the truth of revelation is regarded as being prior to its circumstance. Thus, one modern scholar has characterized this quasi-history as the metahistorical circumstances accommodating the imputation of Koranic sense which is prior to the historical investigation. It is the desired answer, the sense, that prescribes the question posed to historical materials; and this *asbāb an-nuzūl* discipline is therefore paradoxically geared towards severing the historical connection between the circumstances of revelation and the circumstances of history.⁷⁰

The Muslim canon and modernity

We come back to the question of the relation between history and sense, and the proper position of this question leads us to the cognitive regime of modernity. Historicity and historical interpretation lie at the heart of the cognitive apparatus of modernity. I should like to emphasize at the outset the fundamental fact that, with respect to the Arab world, the social and cultural transformations of the nineteenth century have produced mutations of such speed and scale—geographically and socially uneven as they may be, like all historical transformations—that one must be extremely guarded and reserved when trying to suggest, let alone assert, continuity with the medieval mental worlds of Muslim peoples. What must also be stated at the outset is that, until the religious revival of the last two decades, religious thought and representa-

tions have generally been pushed to the side by the newly dominant secular culture. Being secularist in an implicit mode, the modernism of the Arab world did not contest religious representations; it simply replaced and marginalized them.

Historicism, as I have suggested, is a primary component of modernity. For our purposes here, we might refer most specifically to the historical interpretation of texts. Starting with Spinoza and subsequently with greater amplitude, the historical interpretation of texts, inverted the order of patristic exegesis so that interpretation was pre-given and sense was conflated with truth. Thus, philology becomes a means of access not to the Truth, but to a particular historical space and time.⁷¹

The great transformations of the nineteenth century did not bring about such a revolutionary change of attitude by Arab Muslims towards the canon as did Protestant demythologization, however. Their attitude was, and has largely remained, apologetic, in a manner which recalls the apologetic efforts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Protestant Pietists and by Jesuits,⁷² although episodic transitions and breakthroughs towards properly historical considerations of the canon have been made. But the complexity of this apologetic mood itself should not be underestimated. It involved the re-configuration of a number of elements, in varying proportions and with changes over time. The most salient of these is the centrality of scientistic modernism and of modern modes of apprehending society and polity, both of which, in the nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth, assumed an evolutionist and progressivist narrative of reason in history. Correlative with this was a process of transcoding that was characteristic of ages of transition. In this process, positive semiotic value was apportioned at once to the text of the canon and to modernity and modernism, so that canonical interpretation often took the form of translating text into the present world, and the present world into text, the one acting as an extended allegory of the other.

I have already mentioned Shātībī and Ibn Rushd. Their efforts, most systematically of the former, built upon the previous work of Ghazālī. Inspired by Mu‘tazilite notions of theodicy, they produced a notion of the canon as a corpus revealed and transmitted with one primary purpose in mind, namely, human interest, which includes salvation. In this way, legislation enjoined by the canon or prescribed by it was construed as an analogue of natural law, and the religion of Islam as a primeval natural religion of humanity, *dīn al-fitra*. This conception had the added advantage and strength of also being revealed, but revealed gradually, according to the measure of the times and peoples to which

it was revealed. This divine accommodation to human reality is how a history of monotheistic religions and indeed of the history of the Koran, particularly of Koranic abrogation, is perceived, both in medieval scholarship and in modernist reform. Of course, this is not unique to Islam, for we do find a less elaborate notion of divine accommodation in Augustine and other Christian thinkers.

Be that as it may, this thesis concerning *dīn al-fitra*, of perennial religion, is a subject of very great salience to Muslim Reform of the part century and a half. This conflation of the natural and the revealed, the religious and the secular, the canonical and the rational, is at the heart of modern apologetic treatment of the Muslim canon, and its terms—reason and text, nature and revelation—furnish its constitutive vocabulary. Muslim reformists adopted the foundational elements of Shātībī as their link with tradition. And indeed, the publication of texts of Shātībī was instigated by the two foremost reformists of modern Islam, Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) and his pupil Muhammad Rashīd Ridā (d. 1937). The latter, soon after his master’s death, took a decidedly conservative turn which brought him into literalist and primitivist affinities with Wahhabism; it was this that provided the ideological grounds for political Islamism.⁷³ Such a reformist reinterpretation of texts, it must be emphasized, did not seek to disqualify ancient interpretations, but regarded itself as renewal consonant with the advent of a new age of modernity. The fact that it did not seek to historicize ancient traditions and indeed the canonical texts themselves made this approach furtive, hesitant, self-contradictory, and in many respects vulnerable to the fundamentalist attacks that have gathered force in the part two decades. Yet, it did contribute substantially to the modernization and reform of Muslim law where this was maintained, most particularly in the domain of personal status, albeit under civilian jurisdiction.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, it became the mainstay of the official state of Islam in modernizing states.

The status of the canon was unassailed: the traditional narrative of divine inspiration and of the collection of the Koran were retained intact, although the *hadīth* was unevenly subjected to some very fundamental criticism, as it had been in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. All in all, Muslim reformists from ‘Abduh onwards tended to use pragmatic criteria for the selection of new interpretations. They showed little or no concern for a more systematic approach which would have required a recognition of time as an active principle of change; instead, they regarded it implicitly as a “néant actif” in the words of R. Hertz,⁷⁵ which only degrades. This is the sense of *salafiyya*, the Arabic equiva-

lent of fundamentalism (which has since acquired a more literalist meaning), which was applied by the early reformists to themselves. The expression, like the reformist enterprise itself, was much influenced by the example of Martin Luther, and sought in terms of Salafism to gain unmediated access to the original sources and meanings of the faith, a *restauratio ad integrum*. Time is not conceived as in itself the medium and instrument of change, but rather as reappearance, re-enactment, after a period of abeyance, degradation, descent into superstition and irrationalism; in other words, a combination of typology and the historicism of modernity.⁷⁶

With the Koran, the verses which were manifestly in contradiction with modern science and too overly incredible, were re-interpreted in a modernist vein. There is a well known Koranic passage, for example, which relates to the attempt by Abrahā, the Abyssynian governor of Yemen, to conquer Mecca around the time of Muhammad's birth. In the narrative the suggestion is made that this enemy was defeated when it was bombarded by stones thrown by mysterious birds. 'Abduh interprets this weapon of God's as microbes.⁷⁷ In the same vein, he believed the geology, paleontology, and climatology of his age to be relevant for the consideration of canonical narratives, such as the narrative of the Flood—which occurs in the *hadīth* but not the Koran—and similar stories which required either a re-interpretation of the text or else a fideistic silence. All in all, 'Abduh did not regard historical or natural-historical narratives in the Koran, those concerning Abraham for instance or referring to cosmic and astronomical phenomena, to be essential articles of dogma.⁷⁸

In his earlier years Ridā followed his master and went even further, stating that these phenomena could be regarded as providing only salutary examples, not historical information, since the Koran is a book neither of history nor of natural science. Later, Ridā adopted harder views, most particularly when a secularist, Tāhā Husayn, cast doubt on the historicity of Abraham and Isaac.⁷⁹ One example of his fideistic suspension of judgment concerns the existence of the *jinn*. The Koran postulates the existence of a parallel, invisible world in which the *jinn* dwell, but Ridā discerned no Koranic evidence for their reality; another concerns the creation of man from dust and "fœtid mud" (*hama' mas - nūn*), which was equally indemonstrable.⁸⁰ In this way, both rational evidence and the canon are saved. But there were no general exegetical principles laid out to decide which verses or portions of *hadīth* were interpretable, and which were not, and determination of this matter seems to have rested entirely on apologetic or polemical occasion.

Such occasions also precipitated forays into the study of the Bible, in order to counter evangelical anti-Muslim polemics. Some of this is reminiscent of the medieval Muslim Bible criticism already referred to, while other research was more modern in temper, referring to the relation of biblical narratives to Assyrian and Chaldean mythology—a relation denied for the Koran in defense against Evangelical polemics, but re-asserted with reference to the Bible.⁸¹ The attitude towards *hadīth* narratives was very similar, but far more expansive, on account of this being conceived by Muslim Reformism as a second-order canon. Prophetic pronouncements relative to agriculture or to medical matters were thought of as matters of guidance, not of command.⁸² *Grosso modo*, Ridā thought that a *hadīth* was only to be accepted as true if it were in conformity with considerations of the public interest and of utility, and correlatively and significantly asserted that such narratives as were in contradiction with these considerations were in all likelihood of dubious authenticity, including much of what had been authenticated by Bukhārī.⁸³

This curious position, that a *hadīth* can only be authentic if it were in conformity with public interest, is the complement of ‘Abduh’s assertion that if a Koranic statement were fantastic or incredible, such a manifestly incredible sense could not be allocated to it nor thought to be consonant with the “intended sense” of the text.⁸⁴ The theoretical possibility of a thorough transcoding, the regard of the text as an allegory of meanings corresponding to the scientific knowledge and public interest of the present moment, is asserted. Nonetheless, it is as yet ever subverted by building up exception after exception to this, or by proposing a resort to fideism, or by flight to medieval slogans such as the need to ascertain the meaning of canonical words by philological knowledge of the Arabic tongue at the time of Revelation.⁸⁵ The world becomes text, and the canon comes to encompass the world. The nominal translation of the one into the other obviates the need for the serious scrutiny of either, and facilitates the reliance on the received ideas of both. As such, the Koran becomes, as had been the case more systematically in the Middle Ages, the occasion for a somewhat whimsical natural theology, in which Koranic verses referring to nature are taken for indications of God’s wondrous omnipotence, benevolence, and other attributes.

Three consequences are derived from this. The first is non-discursive: it is clear that the polemic of ‘Abduh and Ridā—by the latter against Tāhā Husayn, for instance, as we saw—renders the discretionary authority to release certain portions of the canon to a modernist interpretation

as an exclusive prerogative of the *'ulamā*. Thus, a long tradition is continued, which regards this collectivity, divided as it may be, as self-legitimizing and mutually recognizing, despite the extreme and well-known hostility and contempt of 'Abduh in particular for the great majority of *'ulamā*, whom he regarded as collectively responsible for the descent of Islam into backwardness, superstition, and obscurantism. This has led cumulatively, along with other political factors and most particularly in Egypt, to increasing priestly interference with matters pertaining to culture, and to a greater definition of the sphere of the religious in contradistinction from and in opposition to the secular.⁸⁶ This in its turn prepared the way for fundamentalism, or obscurantist neo-Salafism.

Correlatively, with the greater definition of the religious sphere came the religious definition of knowledge of secular matters, and this is the second consequence of the apologetic translation. We have seen that the Koranic text was selectively divested of the protection afforded by specific historical meaning as by traditionalist interpretations, when it was brought in line with modern science and contemporary requirements of utility and the public interest. Episodically and in many ways, this opened the way to the acquisition of a spiritualized form of knowledge called Islamic knowledge, which in the past three decades has been embedded in institutions that purport to islamize the social and natural sciences.⁸⁷ But this whole process began as a result of the Koranic efforts of 'Abduh and Ridā and others to find rational codes for interpreting scientific and historical matters. Thus, the Pharaoh's army was drowned by a tide,⁸⁸ the Koranic statement concerning the splitting of the moon involved geological thinking in terms of earthquakes, the Prophet's miracle when he provided plentiful amounts of water from a meager amount available to him is explainable in terms of chemistry,⁸⁹ the evil eye is explained in terms of Mesmerism,⁹⁰ and the principles of modern telegraphy accounted for communication between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.⁹¹ All of this, of course, is reminiscent of certain discussions of miracles of Christ in the eighteenth century, although one witnesses there a greater sense of systematization and consistency, which culminated in the work of the Deist Reimarus (d. 1768).

Be that as it may, the imputation of meanings to the Koran that are at once scientific and unsustainable was later amply developed. It started with 'Abduh's student, Tantāwī Jawharī, who produced a multi-volume exegesis which derived the schoolbook sciences of his time from the Koran, and interpreted the text in terms of this knowledge.

Ultimately, this provided an apologetic foundation of procedures for the relative demystification of the Prophetic biography, where the Prophet's nocturnal bodily translation to Jerusalem and to Heaven was given a scientific explanation in terms of the then already discredited notion of the æther, in which science and the text validated each other mutually, without the canon being questioned as to its historicity.⁹² This was later to merge with the general exegesis of the Koran, as fairly standard procedure, and beyond, with the Koran conceived as an announcement, an anticipation, and its text a prefiguration of modern science, from jet propulsion to cybernetics, not excluding Engels' dialectics of nature. This had proliferated widely to the extent of producing works of manifest charlatanism.⁹³

The third consequence of this apologetic transcoding made itself felt in the domains of law, society, and politics. It is here that the mutual translatability between the world and the canonical text was most amply explored. The very notion of the canon as a legal repertory with a trans-temporal versatility again conceives the canon as a metaphor for human interest and utility. Indeed, the canon is here conceived as a metaphor for human utility in general. Islam is thus the religion of reason and *ipso facto* the religion most consonant with human nature. Therefore, Islam's legal order, the *sharī'a*, constitutes a variety of natural law. This was, of course, expressed by early Muslim reformism in terms of an evolutionary conception of history: Islam constitutes the highest point in the religious development of humanity, for if Judaism rests upon unreflective obedience and arbitrary Levitical command, and if Christianity was a religion that addresses the sentiment, Islam combines and transcends both in its foundation within human reason, which controls the sentiment and internalizes divine command by basing it upon reason.⁹⁴ In this way, monotheism is seen to develop along the lines of human evolution, and the divine chronology of prophecy parallels that of mundane evolution, whose two terms are, according to 'Abduh, reason and religion; for man is a creature by nature both religious and rational.⁹⁵

It was thus that Muslim Reformism conceived the legal system—which was no longer theirs—and used the theories most systematically developed by Shātibī. The *sharī'a* as contained in the Muslim canon is structured around five categories of human interest: the preservation of life, property, progeny, religion, and sanity. These categories, being termed the Five Generalities, are cast in terms of a theodicy which, in time, takes on the character of gradualist evolutionism, consonant with the growing rationality and educational cultivation of mankind, which

culminates in Islam. But this of course is somewhat short of a full anthropology of religion, since it posits divine benevolence as the animator of gradualism. Beyond imputed genealogical origin, it is never specifically discussed in Reformist writing what it is which makes these Five Generalities specific to Islam. To these are conjoined a number of procedural principles with regard to the canon: primacy has to be allocated to sense rather than letter, this being the “originally intended” sense; that necessity justifies permission where prohibition had preceded it; that positive rules change with time; that in specifying general rules, local custom has a legislative force equal to that of the canon.⁹⁶

As with questions of Koranic interpretation in general, it is difficult to discern actual principles according to which the canon is deprived of the protection of history and tradition. The way is thus open both for reformist change, as for integralist fundamentalism. Ridā early on proclaimed that only certain punitive elements of the *sharī‘a* were explicit and therefore still relevant, while for the rest all possibilities for legislation were open on grounds of the Five Generalities.⁹⁷ But later, he and virtually all others simultaneously joined the affirmation of open human interest (*maslaha mursala*) with the reluctance and indeed the refusal to disqualify—by historicization and demystification or otherwise by full allegorization—the literalist interpretation of canonical texts.⁹⁸ Thus, in the field of law as well as in natural science and historical knowledge, the canon, most particularly the Koran, was re-canonized when placed beyond history as the allegory of history.

The incidence and spread of reformism should not be exaggerated. With the exception of Egypt from the 1930s onwards, reformist discourse, with its insistence on resorting to canonical sustenance and authority in non-religious discourse, lived on the margins of public culture. This was true even though it was supported by state authorities (even resolutely secular states such as Syria) and disseminated in the educational system as religious instruction. It was not systematically or deliberately cultivated, since religion was generally marginal to public life, but it was always available when religious matters came up. Only recently is it again having a certain salience in view of the attack upon secular institutions and against reformism itself by political neo-salafism. This has gathered considerable force for a variety of reasons which we cannot go into now, but which, it must be stressed, have nothing to do with the commonly-held notion of a return to origins.⁹⁹ Neo-Salafism is also exercising a strong contrary influence on reformism, pushing it into conservative positions.

There was not, as I have suggested, much interest in the canon, in its history and formation. *Grosso modo*, miraculous and incredible aspects of the canon were matters of indifference, its ahistoricity being regarded as a matter of self-evidence. The exception is, again, Egypt, where historical study of the canon was severely censured and politically besieged by the institution of the Azhar through a succession of celebrated causes, the most famous of which was that of Tāhā Husayn. He wished to study early Islam from a point of view that was purely historical and to which religion would be irrelevant. Thus, he postulated that the language of Koranic verses reflected the environment from which they emerged, and that descent from Abraham was an historical myth much like that of Aeneas, which served political purposes.

I have suggested that this and correlative viewpoints were not at all isolated, and that they were complementary to the *de facto* secularization of Arab intellectual life. Indeed, these viewpoints reflect only some of the very many views which were roughly similar, but which did not attain the prominence provided by polemical notoriety¹⁰⁰—a polemical notoriety which, it has been suggested, formed part of the process of self-definition of the religious sphere, and its totalization in the context of the political integralism of neo-Salafism. The secular learning and scholarship about Muslim origins has not, however, developed systematically or cumulatively. One reason for this is the character and organization of academic life in the Arab world. But it is also partly because of indifference, ideological antipathy, or considerations of prudence, although there have been some valuable works produced on the assumption that the canon is not a canon, but that it is a worldly corpus of texts produced by humans under determinate conditions.¹⁰¹

As for canonicity for those who hold to its existence, there has been in the recent part one orientation which has taken a literalist drift, usually allied to political radicalism, and another, reformism, which finds itself on the defensive. As suggested, this is a bifurcation into increasingly conservative and integralist positions, and into attempts to deepen and further to systematize the tradition of ‘Abduh and the early Ridā. Of the former tendency, a cognitive Islamization, even a perceptual Islamization, is being advocated in the name of the Islamization of life, in which the Koran and the prophetic example are woven together into a systematic and integralist utopia. This utopia constitutes the type of which the desired future will, by political voluntarism, become a figure. While within this trend certain elements of the reformist program are present, these are reduced to Salafism, and to the very general rudiments of notions of public interest as a matter changing in time

along with an entropy of specification. Thus, while the transcoding on which I have dwelt is still maintained in principle, in practice the new code is reduced to virtually zero information in the face of the typology reinserted at the heart of this literalist ideological program.

Representatives of the other trend in Egypt—and reference is particularly made to Egypt on account of the particular salience of these matters there—had sought to continue some of the earlier directions and push them further. These individuals produced some highly interesting results, but they were under continuous and increasing pressure. M. A. Khalaf Allāh, following the programmatic views of A. Khūlī, for which he himself was ideologically besieged, advocated the necessity of treating the Koranic text first and foremost as a text and the necessity to take seriously and to treat consequentially the non-sequential character of the Koranic text.¹⁰² He produced a work on the narrative techniques of the Koran, in which he took seriously not only the necessity of literary and rhetorical analysis of the text, but also regarding Koranic narratives as exemplary rather than historical.¹⁰³

Various other misfortunes befell others in Egypt, including a murder by Islamist radicals, and the continuing persecution of N. H. Abū Zaid by those credited with reformist moderation, including the Azhar as a corporate collectivity if not as an official institution. Very much and quite consciously in the tradition of Khūlī, Abū Zaid insists on producing a Koranic *Sitz im Leben* and on the priority of a literary, semantic, and socio-linguistic study of the Koran above all else. According to Abū Zaid, the aesthetic of reception in seventh-century Arabia should form an important part.¹⁰⁴ Much of his work seems to be necessarily taken up with the task of clearing the decks: of commenting on received traditional modes of interpretation as well as on neo-Salafist literalism. But there are many points at which advances are made. On certain topics, this takes up his entire effort without leading to a reconsideration of the matter, as in the case of the Koranic Mysterious Letters.¹⁰⁵

Yet, at no point does the reader discern serious departures from the reformist mode, although Abū Zaid's work is an attempt of far greater systematic and thoroughgoing amplitude than before. His is not a secularist historical criticism, although the author consistently warns against mixing religion with political life and against expanding and totalizing the domain of the religious, but one which tries to reconstitute historical credibility to the Book. It does not suspend the notion of inspiration (*wahī*), although in a consistent transcoding mode, it refers to the ancient Arabian concept of inspiration as one involving communication with

other worlds, like those of the *jinn*, by soothsayers and poets.¹⁰⁶ Stated in this way, the use of Koranic and contemporary Arabian vocabulary, of course, neither necessarily implies nor necessarily excludes divine origin. Rather, it produces a complex configuration in which unbelief could not be imputed, but in which inspiration could be taken equally for a voice of divine origin and an inner Muhammadan state of fantasy, like that described, among others, by Maxime Rodinson. Yet, in all cases, the Koran is supposed to have a simple history of composition, devolving to speech delivered by the Muhammadan voice and recorded as such. But this matter also connects with neo-Mu'tazilite theological choices—or rather authorities and cover—adopted by Abū Zaid who, in his quest for the humanization of the Koranic text, critically discusses the traditional theories of the Koranic text as being co-eternal with God, and the notion of Koranic inimitability (*i'jāz*), in terms derived from the medieval Mu'tazilite critique of these assertions.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, Abū Zaid does not contest the notion of Koranic abrogation, but tries to rationalize it by limiting the remit and range of its applicability.¹⁰⁸ He questions not the relevance in principle, but the ascertainability of the history of Revelation and of the earliest Koranic codices.¹⁰⁹ He also accepts—without the detailed textual study advocated by al-Khūlī—the division of Koranic chapters into the Meccan and the Medinan in a manner that rationalizes this distinction somewhat on fairly rough textual criteria.¹¹⁰ And in accounting for Koranic abrogation and constructing criteria for the historical sequence of the Koranic composition (which seems in his work to be incontestably Muhammadan) he invokes the principle of gradual Revelation, which implies a deliberate process of teleological social engineering and divine voluntarism.¹¹¹ And, of course, Abū Zaid's work contains much reclamation of the Koranic text against the uses to which it is put by integralism and political Islamism, and this, together with an apologetic notion of historical research in which historicity becomes selectively applied and withheld, sets definite limits to the sense of cognitive responsibility.

Notes

- ¹ N. Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible as Literature*, London, 1982, p. 206.
- ² See M. Roncaglia, "Éléments Ebionites et Elkesaites dans le Koran," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 21 (1971), pp. 101–26, for suggestive approximations and for a resolutely old-fashioned account, which well illustrates the possibilities and limits of modern scholarship, not the least of which is the unresolved difficulty of dealing with late antique heresiographical tropes and their modern incarnations. Cf. S. H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muhammad, his Scripture, and his Message according to Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century," in *La vie du Prophète Mahomet. Colloque de Strasbourg (Octobre 1980)*, Paris, 1983, pp. 99–146, pp. 118 ff.
- ³ A. T. Welch, "Al-Kur'ān," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edition, p. 409; A. Neuwirth, "Qur'ān," in *Grundriss des arabischen Philologie (Bd. II., Literaturwissenschaft)*, ed. H. Gätje, Wiesbaden, 1987, p. 96; F. E. Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23 (1991), p. 292. See in particular, most recently, the overview of F. Déroche, *Le Coran*, Paris, 2005.
- ⁴ J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford, 1977; J. Van Ess, book review, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* XXXV (1978), pp. 349–53.
- ⁵ See provisionally A. Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen, und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung*, Bonn, 1973. An idea of the present state of Western scholarship on *hadīth* historiography may be obtained from H. Motzki, "Quo vadis, Hadīth-Forschung? Eine kritische Untersuchung von G. H. A Juynboll: 'Nāfi', the *mawlā* of Ibn 'Umar, and his Position in Muslim *hadīth* Literature," *Der Islam* 7 (1996), pp. 40–80.
- ⁶ J. Burton, *The Collection of the Koran*, Cambridge, 1977.
- ⁷ Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," pp. 304, 306; see in general M. Rodinson, "A Critical Survey of Modern Studies of Muhammad," in *Studies in Islam*, ed. M. Swartz, New York, 1981, pp. 23–85.
- ⁸ For a suggestive hypercritical study of the entire mass of early Muslim traditions, see S. Al-Bashīr, *Muqaddima fi't-tārikh al-ākhar. Fi naqd al-riwāya al-islāmiyya* [Preface to Another History. On the Criticism of Islamic Narratives], Jerusalem, 1986.
- ⁹ Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," pp. 298–9.
- ¹⁰ Cf. 'A. Sharfi, "Fi qirā'at an-nass ad-dini" [On Reading Religious Texts], in *Fi qirā'at an-nass ad-dini*, ed. 'A. Sharfi et al., Tunis, 1990, pp. 23–5.
- ¹¹ See H. Modarresi, "Early Debates on the Integrity of the Koran. A Brief Survey," *Studia Islamica* LXVII (1993), pp. 5–40.
- ¹² W. A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, Paris and The Hague, 1977.
- ¹³ On the complexity of this matter, see C. Gilliot, "Les sept 'lectures': corps social et écriture révélée," *Studia Islamica* LXI (1985) pp. 5–26, and LXIII (1986), pp. 49–62.
- ¹⁴ See T. Fahd, *Le panthéon de l'Arabie centrale à la veille de L'Hégire*, Paris, 1968 ; and idem, "Problèmes de typologie dans la 'sira' d'Ibn Ishāq," in *La*

- vie du Prophète Mahomet. Colloque de Strasbourg (Octobre 1980)*, Paris, 1983, pp. 67–75.
- ¹⁵ See W. A. Graham, “The Qur’ān as Spoken Word,” in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. R. C. Martin, Tucson, 1985, pp. 23–40.
- ¹⁶ But see now, crucially, D. Madigan, *The Qur’ān’s Self-Image. Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture*, Princeton, 2001.
- ¹⁷ See the considerations of M. Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry*, Columbus, 1978, *passim*.
- ¹⁸ See T. Fahd, *Le panthéon de l’Arabie centrale à la veille de L’Hégire*; A. Neuwirth, “Qur’ān,” pp. 106–8; Welch, “Al-Kur’ān,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed., pp. 402–9; Burton, *The Collection of the Koran*, pp. 131 ff., Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretatio*, pp. 47–8, 65, and *passim*; M. Arkoun, *Lectures du Coran*, Paris, 1982, pp. 5 ff., 27–40; C. Gilliot, “Muhammad, le Coran, et les ‘contraintes de l’histoire’,” in *The Qur’ān as Text*, ed. S. Wild, Leiden, 1996, pp. 3–26; A. Neuwirth, “Vom Rezitationstext über die Liturgie zum Kanon,” in *The Qur’ān as Text*, pp. 69–105. See also M. Smith, “The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of Biblical Studies* LXXI (1952), pp. 135–47; J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, 2nd ed., 1927, Berlin and Leipzig, 1887.
- ¹⁹ ‘Alī’s vast work, (J. Ali, *Al-Mufasssal fī tārikh al-‘arab qabl al-Islām* [Detailed History of the Arabs before Islam], 9 vols., Baghdad and Beirut, 1968–71) contains very valuable material which is difficult to assess on account of the author’s uncritical use of sources. But see also, for instance, S. M. Al-Qumṇī, “Madkhal ilā fahm dawr al-mithūlūjiyā at-tawrātiyya” [Introduction to Biblical Mythology], *Al-Karmil* 30 (1988), pp. 45 ff.; and idem, 1987, pp. 43 ff.
- ²⁰ T. Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns* [1860], incorporating the revisions and additions of F. Schwally, G. Bergsträsser, and O. Pretzl (1909–38), Hildesheim and New York, 1981.
- ²¹ One might especially refer to A. Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur’ān*, Leiden, 1937; W. M. Watt, *Bell’s Introduction to the Koran*, Edinburgh, 1970; and T. Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur’ān. A Semantical Analysis of the Koranic Weltanschauung*, Tokyo, 1964.
- ²² Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible as Literature*, p. 206.
- ²³ See E. Beck, “Iblis und Mensch, Satan und Adam: Der Werdegang einer koranischen Erzählung,” *Le Muséon* 89 (1976), pp. 195–244.
- ²⁴ U. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder. The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by Early Muslims*, Princeton, 1995; but see *ibid.*, ch. 15. See also Fahd, *Le panthéon de l’Arabie centrale à la veille de L’Hégire*.
- ²⁵ Sharfi, “*Fi qirā’at an-nass ad-dini*,” pp. 11–38; Arkoun, *Lectures du Coran*, 1982, pp. xx–xxii.
- ²⁶ See the comments of Welch, “Al-Kur’ān,” 409 col. 2, and the references indicated.
- ²⁷ Cf. Al-Azmeh, “Chronophagous Discourse: A Study of the Clerico-Legal Appropriation of the World in an Islamic Tradition,” chapter 3 of this volume; and J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung, und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, Munich, 1992, pp. 87, 89, 97.
- ²⁸ See, for instance, J. Jomier, “La place du Coran dans la vie quotidienne en Égypte,” *Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes* 15 (1952), pp. 131–65.

- ²⁹ Al-Azmeh, "Chronophagous Discourse: A Study of the Clerico-Legal Appropriation of the World in an Islamic Tradition," chapter 3 of this volume.
- ³⁰ T. Todorov, *Symbolisme et interpretation*, Paris, 1978, p. 104.
- ³¹ P. Legendre, *L'amour du censeur. Essai sur l'ordre dogmatique*, Paris, 1974, p. 90.
- ³² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 109.
- ³³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 109; and A. and J. Assmann, "Kanon und Zensur," in *idem* (eds.), *Kanon und Zensur. Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation II*, Munich, 1987, pp. 11 ff.
- ³⁴ See particularly the important work of B. M. Wheeler, *Applying the Canon in Islam. The Authorization and Maintenance of Interpretive Reasoning in Hanafī Scholarship*, Albany, 1996.
- ³⁵ David Carpenter, "The Mastery of Speech. Canonicity and Control in the Vedas," in *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon. Essays in Vedic Interpretation*, ed. L. Patton, Albany, 1994, *passim*.
- ³⁶ Graham, "The Qur'ān as Spoken Word," p. 34.
- ³⁷ See in general C. Mansour, *L'Autorité dans la pensée musulmane. Le concept d'Ijmā (consensus) et la problématique de l'autorité*, Paris, 1975, pp. 60 ff.
- ³⁸ On the notion of *khavar*, see A. Al-Azmeh, *Al-Kitāba al tārikiyya wa'l-ma'rifa al tārikiyya* [Historical Writing and Historical Knowledge], 2nd ed., Beirut, 1995, ch. 1; on narrative veracity, see *idem*, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, London, 1986, pp. 162 ff.
- ³⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Les Prolégomènes d'Ibn Khaledoun*, vol. 2, ed. E. Quatremère, Paris, 1858, p. 399.
- ⁴⁰ Al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-kubrā* [Shāfi'ite Biographies], vol. 2, ed. 'A. Hilū and M. M. Tanāhī, Cairo, 1964, p. 9.
- ⁴¹ Al-Rāzī, *Kitāb asās at-taqdis* [The Ground of Sanctification], Cairo, 1910 [A.H. 1328], pp. 205–10.
- ⁴² Al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-kifāya fi 'ilm ar-riwāya* [A Comprehensive Treatment of Narrative Science], Hyderabad, 1938 [A.H. 1357], pp. 4346.
- ⁴³ Sakhāwī, *al-I'lān bi't-tawbikh li man dhamma at-tārikh* [Remonstrance against Critics of History], Damascus, 1930 [A.H. 1349], pp. 68–9.
- ⁴⁴ For an example from the same time period, see Ibn al-Salah, *'Ulūm al-hadīth* [Sciences of Tradition], Medina, 1966 [A.H. 1386], pp. 10–114.
- ⁴⁵ See Al-Azmeh, "Chronophagous Discourse: A Study of the Clerico-Legal Appropriation of the World in an Islamic Tradition," chapter 3 of this volume.
- ⁴⁶ *Idem*, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, ch. 5.
- ⁴⁷ P. von Moos, *Geschichte als Topik. Das rhetorische Exemplum von der Antike zur Neuzeit und die historiae im 'Policraticus' Johannes von Salisbury*, Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York, 1966; C. Bremond, J. Le Goff, and J.-C. Schmitt, *L'Exemplum*, Turnhout, 1982; E. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, Cambridge, Mass., 1963.
- ⁴⁸ Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 201 ff.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. Todorov, *Symbolisme et interpretation*, 1978, pp. 128 ff.
- ⁵⁰ Al-Azmeh, "Islamic Legal Theory and the Appropriation of Reality," in *Islamic Law: Social and Historical Contexts*, ed. A. Al-Azmeh, London, 1988, pp.

250 ff.; and idem, "Chronophagous Discourse: A Study of the Clerico-Legal Appropriation of the World in an Islamic Tradition," pp. 186 ff. (this book, ch. 3)

- ⁵¹ There are few creditable general studies of Koranic exegesis. For a general account, see M. H. Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wa-al-mufasssīrūn* [Exegesis and the Exegetics], 3 vols., Cairo, 1961–2; for a standard general account, somewhat dated today, see L. Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, Leiden, 1920; for historically and methodologically critical accounts of the genre and its procedures, see N. H. Abu Zaid, *Maḥmūd an-nass. Dirāsa fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* [The Concept of Text. A Study in Koranic Sciences], Cairo, 1993; Sharfi, "Fi qirā'at an-nass ad-dini," and Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue, et théologie en Islam. L'exégèse coranique de Tabari*, Paris, 1990; and the fuller statement in the same author's doctoral dissertation, *Aspects de l'imaginaire islamique commun dans le Commentaire de Tabari*, Université Paris III, 1987. For a textual and conceptual study of Koranic metaphor, see Abu Zaid, *Al-Ittijāh al-'aqlī fī't-tafsīr. Dirāsa fī qadiyyat majāz al-Qur'ān 'ind al-Mu'tazida* [The Rationalist Trend in Exegesis. A Study of Koranic Metaphor according to the Mu'tazida], Beirut, 1982; and idem, *Falsafat at-ta'wīl: Dirāsa fī ta'wīl al-Qur'ān 'inda Muḥyī ad-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī* [The Philosophy of Hermeneutics. A Study in the Koranic Hermeneutics of Ibn 'Arabī], Beirut, 1983. See now W. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, Leiden, 2004.
- ⁵² Gilliot, "Les sept 'lectures': corps social et écriture révélée," pp. 260, 320.
- ⁵³ See the account of Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* [Definitive Treatise on Koranic Sciences] vol. 1, ed. M. A. Ibrāhīm, Cairo, 1972, pp. 35 ff.
- ⁵⁴ See K. Abu Deeb, *Al Jurjānīs Theory of Poetic Imagery*, Warminster, 1979; Abū Zaid, *Al-Ittijāh al-'aqlī fī't-tafsīr*.
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- ⁵⁹ Among others, I. di Matteo, "Il 'Tahrif' od alterazione della Bibbia secondo i musulnani," *Bessarione* XXVI (1922), pp. 64–111, 223–60.
- ⁶⁰ P. Legendre, *L'amour du censeur. Essai sur l'ordre dogmatique*, Paris, 1974, p. 78.
- ⁶¹ Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible as Literature*, p. 81; cf. C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, tr. K. Blamey, Cambridge, Mass., 1981, pp. 183, 191.
- ⁶² Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible as Literature*, p. 80.
- ⁶³ Al-Azmeh, "Chronophagous Discourse: A Study of the Clerico-Legal Appropriation of the World in an Islamic Tradition," chapter 3 of this volume.
- ⁶⁴ For the argument that follows, see idem, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 87 ff.

- ⁶⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Mihakk an-nazar fi'L-mantiq* [The Criterion of Logic], ed. B. Na'sāni and M. Qabbāni, Cairo, n.d., p. 33.
- ⁶⁶ Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, pp. 90–1, 173–4; idem, “Chronophagous Discourse,” chapter 3 of this volume.
- ⁶⁷ C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, London, 1972, pp. 20–1.
- ⁶⁸ Erwin Panofsky as quoted in A. Fletcher, *Allegory. The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, Ithaca and London, 1964, p. 25n.
- ⁶⁹ Cf. B. Johansen, “Casuistry: Between Legal Concept and Social Praxis,” *Islamic Law Society* 2 (1995).
- ⁷⁰ A. Umlīl, *Fī shar'īyyat al-ikhtilāf* [On the Legitimacy of Difference], Rabat, 1991, pp. 48–50.
- ⁷¹ Todorov, *Symbolisme et interpretation*, pp. 132 ff., 142.
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- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 282, 512–3.
- ⁷⁹ M. R. Ridā, *Fatāwi al-Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Ridā* [Fatwas of Ridā], 5 vols., ed. Y. Khūri and S. al-Munajjid, Beirut, 1970, pp. 45, 719.
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- ⁸¹ 'Abduh and Ridā, *Tafsīr al-Fātiha* [Exegesis of the Fātiha], Cairo, 1901 [A.H. 1319], pp. 100–23; Abduh-*Āmāl al-kāmila*, vol. 5, pp. 22–3 and *passim*; Ridā, *Shubuhāt an Nasārā wa hujaj al-Islām* [Christian Illusions and Muslim Arguments], Cairo, 1904, pp. 2–14, 15, 33–6. For the Evangelical polemic, see the appendix to Jirjis Sīl [George Sale], *Maqāla fī al-Islām* [Treatise on Islam], tr. Hāshim al-'Arabi [pseudonym], 5th ed., Cairo, 1909, pp. 323–5 and *passim*.
- ⁸² Ridā, *Fatāwi al-Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Ridā*, pp. 209, 731–3.
- ⁸³ Ridā, *Muhāwarat al-muslih wa'l-muqallid* [Dialogue between the Reformist and the Traditionalist], Cairo, 1916 [A.H. 1334]; idem, “Bāb al-intiqād 'alā al-Manār” [On Criticism of al-Manār], *al-Manār* 28 (1927), #6, p. 474.
- ⁸⁴ 'Abduh, *al A'māl al-kāmila*, vol. 2, pp. 512–3.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 282.
- ⁸⁶ Al-Azmeh, *Al-'Ilmāniyya min manzūr mukhtalif* [Secularism], Beirut 1992, pp. 228 ff.

- ⁸⁷ On the political epistemology of this discursive *topos*, see idem, *Islams and Modernities*, ch. 3.
- ⁸⁸ Ridā, *Shubuhāt an Nasārā wa hujaj al-Islām* [Illusions of Christians and Arguments of Islam], Cairo, 1322/1904, p. 5.
- ⁸⁹ H. Al-Jisr, *Al-Risāla al-Hamīdiyya* [The Hamidian Treatise], ed. Kh. Ziyāda, Tripoli, n.d., pp. 64–5.
- ⁹⁰ Ridā, *Fatāwi al-Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Ridā*, p. 209.
- ⁹¹ J. al-Afghāni, *Al A'māl al-kāmila* [Complete Works], ed. M. 'Umāra, Cairo, n.d., pp. 286–9.
- ⁹² Al-Azmeh, *Al-'Ilmāniyya min manzūr mukhtalif*, pp. 239–40.
- ⁹³ Ibid., pp. 293, 296.
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- ⁹⁶ Ridā, *Muhāwarat al-muslih wa'l-muqallid*, pp. 53, 58–9.
- ⁹⁷ Ridā, *Fatāwi al-Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Ridā*, p. 36.
- ⁹⁸ For instance, Ridā, *Muhāwarat al-muslih wa'l-muqallid*, pp. 135–6.
- ⁹⁹ Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, ch. 3.
- ¹⁰⁰ Idem, 1992, pp. 221 ff., 268 ff.
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- ¹⁰³ M. A. Khalaf Allāh, *Al-Fann al-qasasi fī'al-Qur'ān* [Narrative Arts in the Koran], 2nd ed., Cairo, 1957.
- ¹⁰⁴ Abū Zaid, *Mafhūm an-nass. Dirāsa fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Cairo, 1993, *passim*.
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- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 14–147.
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CHAPTER 5

God's Chronography and Dissipative Time¹

Apocalypses are of interest not only to antiquarians or religious ideologues. They subtend and rest upon a rich and ubiquitous conception of time which is, as we shall see, of salience to fields far broader than eschatology or of salvation history, and this judgement I believe applies to all apocalypses including those of Islam, all of which treat temporality in a manner that is conceptually isomorphous. This is a conception of time that brings out with particular sharpness of relief and of definition, almost as an ideal-type, notions of history that are of an ubiquity far greater than is generally perceived: conceptions of history upon which rest revivalisms of all descriptions, religious (as Reform) and secular (nationalist and romantic-conservative), and conceptions of history implicit in the historiography of large-scale historical masses such as civilizations, nations, geographical blocks (such as the West) that are in evidence in textbooks, magazine articles, bar-room musings on roots and identities, and erudite manuals. These all construe histories of their favored units, civilizations or nations, in terms of rise and of decline, of persistence, adulteration and senescence, telescoping times and events by means of typology and of tropes of repetition, degeneration and regeneration.

Of these historiographic notions, there are specifically two concepts of time that are of salience, and which bear illustration and sharp definition from the apocalyptic ideal-type. One of them is recursive histories which construe the labor of time in terms of repetition, of the re-enactment of beginnings, such as we see in Herder, Toynbee, Huntington, and others, in what amounts to a natural history of human society or of "culture areas" or civilizations.² The other is the confusion of typology and causality in histories such as these, where continuity is taken for a figure of "origin." This is where Noah's Ark is taken to prefigure the Church, Muhammad to repeat earlier prophets, the medieval Norman wars in North Africa (as with Ranke and Hegel) repeating Rome's

Punic wars, and medieval kingship regarded to be the imitation of Christ, and in which Islamophobia is taken for a repetition of the Crusades, in such a way that typology, figured by causality, is an allegory in the medium of time.³

Both of these notions are best seen through the mind of God, and there is no better guide to the workings of the mind of God than St. Augustine. Commenting on the Gospel of James (1:17), “for with him [God], there is no variation or shadow of any moment,” Augustine offered the following description of God’s perception of time:

It is not that there is any difference in God’s knowledge according as it is produced by things not yet in existence, by things now or by things that are no more. Unlike us, He does not look ahead to the future, see the present before him, and look back to the past. Rather he sees events in another way, far and profoundly different from any experience that is familiar to our minds. For he does not variably turn his attention from one thing to another ... Hence all events in time, events that will be and are not yet and those that are now, being present, and those that have passed and are no more, all of them are apprehended by him in a motionless and everlasting present moment ... Nor does it make any difference whether he looks at them from present, past or future, since his knowledge, unlike ours, of the three kinds of time, present, past and future, does not change as time changes ... Neither does [God’s] attention stray from one subject to another (...) for he knows events in time without any temporal acts of knowing of his own.⁴

As a scheme for conceiving past, present, and future, eschatology and the apocalyptic constitute a sub-species of salvation history whose differentia is the construal of selected events as mystical signs presaging an eschatological time that terminates human history. Broadly speaking, eschatology can in terms of its socio-political moorings be differentiated between the apocalyptic and the conventional. By eschatological convention I understand a schema of salvation history in which the history of the past and the history of the future are conjoined in the perspective of a quietist determinism without reference to the imminence of the End, and unlike chiliasm and various forms of messianism in the activist mode, it is therefore a mythological repertoire which excludes social forms of mythopraxis, of the attempts to realize finalist prophecies. In this sense, apocalyptic convention is distinguishable from the activist messianism that characterized many movements of revolt and of state formation in the histories of Muslim peoples. I take

it here to refer to the elaboration by the Sunnī clerical classes of a conservative textual traditions of messianic prophecy (I am excluding here consideration of Shi'ite traditions, which are in many ways comparable, but crucially distinctive in other ways). This particular Sunnī apocalyptic tradition disengages Signs of the End, of the accomplishment and termination of human history, together from political action and from the chronometric time of human history, and lodges them in a repertoire of accomplishments past, and of accomplishments to come, which is altogether contemplative and devoid of practical implications for historical actors. In the register of the text, these prophecies complete and reconfirm the overall veracity of Muhammadan Tradition (*hadīth*) by confirming its messianic prophecies. This prophetic textualism thus comes to constitute a logolatric form of devotion to the Prophet by the constant reconfirmation of the miracle of prophecy that Muhammad performed.

This impeccable prophetic veracity is doubly reconfirmed by the seamless and smooth transition between Signs past, present and future inscribed in eschatological Traditions attributed to Muhammad. This seamless transition takes place in a temporal medium which organizes the succession of apocalyptic Signs in a perspective of eternity, the eternity of Augustine's "motionless moment." This perspective of the divine mind, translated to inspired prophecy, is only very contingently related to the chronometer, in which eschatological time, as will be presently shown, is taken for the medium of succession which extrudes particular events considered as Signs from the ordinary parameters that connect events to their mundane historical circumstances, and places them in a register of succession adjacent but ontologically unrelated to the ordinary time of the chronometer. Such events that are considered as Signs are endowed with a qualitative accent whose connection to the chronometer is a-rhythmic, in such a way that their being in time is discernible only by their succession. As we shall see, the ritual reconfirmation of Muhammadan veracity takes the form of the simple device of pairing what Tradition designated as his apocalyptic statements, gnomic as well as explicit, with specific events that followed his life and that will come in the future, such that Muhammadan apocalyptic traditions act as *ex eventu* prophecies, as realized eschatology, as well as eschatologically-weighted events to come. The rest of Muslim history, that which is excluded from this apocalyptic register, becomes the domain of a temporality whose main characteristic is that it is dissipative, inherently monotonous, a story of unending carnage and greed, and captive to redundancy and inconsequence, in contrast to the aggrega-

tively qualitative structure of eschatological time which, while the succession of its Signs cannot be said to be inherently cumulative or processual, yet can still be said to be a register of progressive accomplishment and serial completion which acquire a coherence outside chronometric time.

They therefore constitute a chronographic model in the process of completion by an agency external to their unfolding. In this chronography, time is by nature spatial rather than serial. Its moments do not imply a teleology, for history has in it what in human terms might be regarded as a terminus of completion. For these moments in succession have no internal dynamic as might be expressed in the Aristotelian terms of an *entelecheia*, which might impel an immanent process that connects its successive moments, and their ultimate configuration is rather more akin to the completion of a mosaic than the termination of a series. The structure in question is geometrical rather than arithmetical.

I do not propose to take up here the analysis of salvation-historical temporality, which I have done elsewhere in the broader context of traditionalist discourse,⁵ and which I have termed “chronophagous.” Nor will I approach the matter of the overall typological history of prophecy from Adam to the Messiah (*al-Mahdī* or *al-Qā’im* to the *Shī’a* in their various denominations) of which the eschatological history of Islam is the final moment.⁶ It is rather the conjunction in continuity of the history of the future with the history of Signs from the Muslim past, as canonized in *hadīth*—the repertoire of Traditions, enunciative as well as active, actions as well as pronouncements, attributed to Muhammad—and elaborated within this body of Traditions, that will be the central concern of the following paragraphs. What I propose in the following paragraphs is a marginal gloss on the passage from Augustine quoted at the outset, and this I propose to do by setting out some salient elements of the history of the future in a central Muslim tradition. But before I do so, a number of prefatory observations will be in order, observations concerning the temporal parameters of the traditional material in question, and concerning the genre-specific character of this material.

* * *

With regard to historical termini, and without wishing to enter into an elaborate discussion of periodization, I shall start with the first definitive repertoire of canonical eschatological *hadīth*, written by Nu‘aym b. Hammād,⁷ a Traditionalist and pietist who died in prison in ca. 843

during the persecution of the Caliph al-Mu'tasim, and whose collection of 1,056 narratives under scrutiny here, composed during the period A.D. 833–8,⁸ was the first collection of *hadīth* in the mode of *musnad* (slightly predating the *musnad* of his younger contemporary Ahmad b. Hanbal,⁹ and the later, canonical and comprehensive *hadīth* collections of Muslim, Bukhārī, Ibn Māja, Abū Dāwūd, and Tirmidhī).¹⁰ I do so despite the controversial standing and sceptical assessment of this collection and of its author, which did not prevent it from being most extensively and consistently used. I will end with the work of al-Barzanjī, whose work¹¹ was completed in 1665 (BI, 287). To this stretch of some eight centuries may be ascribed a sectoral continuity, that is to say, a continuity of Tradition, that of a finite and definitive textual repertoire which underwent a process of restatement, elaboration, expurgation, criticism, commentary, and systematization. All of these operations upon this body of eschatological *hadīth* are explicit in the work of al-Barzanjī who, like scholars of *hadīth* in the intervening period to whom occasional reference will be made, used the collection of Nu'aym as a base, as for instance the Andalusian Traditionalist, jurist, and Koranic exegete 'Abd Allāh b. Muhammad al-Qurtubī (d. 1272), author of an important intermediate treatise on eschatology.¹² Indeed, the edition of Nu'aym at hand is based on a manuscript copy held in London and completed in Damascus in 1306–7, during a period which witnessed a heightened interest in *hadīth* under the Ayyubids and the Mamluks between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries, first in Damascus (exemplified by Ibn Kathīr—d. 1373) and later in Cairo (exemplified by Ibn Hajar—d. 1449), and which witnessed among other things the operation of a theologically and pietistically led historical criticism of certain sections of *hadīth*, designed to remove from it matters thought to be morally unacceptable and in consequence improbable, as well as the unacceptably marvelous and miraculous, and designed to confine miraculous powers exclusively to Prophet, to some selected historical and prophetic personalities, and of course to the Divinity.

In other words, we have here the continuity of a repertoire of Tradition which traverses other orders of historical reality, cutting across the classical and medieval periods of Muslim history, with their distinctive and internally diverse modes of political organization, social formations, sociologies of knowledge sacred and profane, and mentalities, a sectoral textual continuity that belongs rather to the time of the canon, the time of textual and referential authority within the bodies of Muslim religious discourse. This is a continuity in many ways comparable to

certain sectoral continuities identified by Jacques Le Goff in his “long moyen âge.”¹³

Nu‘aym was active at the crucial time during which a strong sense existed among certain circles that foundations were being definitively laid, and during which in consequence the strong sense was conveyed that this classical repertoire of religious texts was being completed in detail now that its foundations had been incontrovertibly established and were being inventoried: these comprised of the definitive canonical collections of *hadīth* in the second half of the ninth century and, somewhat later, by the setting of the canonical readings of the Koran into its henceforth seven admissible phonetic redactions, by the use of textual techniques applied to the assimilation and organization of materials truly or putatively emanating from the proto- and palaeo-Islamic period, the period which comprised of roughly the first century and a half of Muslim history.

For his part, al-Barzanjī thrived in the relative timelessness and sense of closure of what we might designate as the late medieval period of this sector of religious tradition, a sense closure which also discerned, over the smooth face of certainty and of confidence, a series of past and present disturbances of an antinomian nature that expressed themselves eschatologically, and which therefore needed to be accounted for in a register of anti-history—true and consequential history being constituted of those events qualified as eschatological Signs. This anti-history has a sense contrary to the history of salvation, one which is paradoxical and unexplained as to its sheer existence, and which finds none but an implicit explanation, that mundane history is inevitably one of decline, and that prophecy and its repetition across human history is a history of elevating re-enactment, of protological reassertion, of the return of things to their original order, with the debris of this process being eventually relegated to Hell.¹⁴ There is not to my knowledge any comprehensive and systematic apocalyptic treatise in the central lands of Islam posterior to that of al-Barzanjī, although eschatological moods, movements and writings of more restricted scope do come into evidence, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and at the close of the twentieth, in addition to a certain number of apologetic writings imbued with a decided sense of fatigue, and perhaps of irrelevance.

Moreover, both authors, in their private biographies, led itinerant lives, Nu‘aym having been born in Marw (in today’s Afghanistan), studied *hadīth* and worked in the juridical systems of Iraq, Arabia and Egypt, and died in Baghdad during the persecution that pitted caliphal

practice and dogma against the then emerging fideist theology which was later to crystallize within Sunnism. As for al-Barzanjī, he was born in a small village in northern Mesopotamia, and studied in Baghdad, Hamadhān, Damascus, Constantinople, and Cairo, and died in Medina, where he composed his eschatological treatise, ending his days in the proximity of the Prophet's tomb, as befitted his pietistic temper and traditionist's vocation. Both had a Muslim ecumenical vocation conceived beyond space and beyond time, a vocation to which both space and time were subordinate to the space of canon and its atopian atemporality. The specific structures of society, polity, mentality, production of knowledge, and historical circumstance that made for the adoption of this attitude by the authors to which it applies are beyond the scope of this study.

As for genre-specific matters, we must distinguish the writings in question from the *Malāhim*, prophecies of an historical and political character concerning the fate of specific reigns and of dynasties. These tend to be oracular in their enunciative mode and, with time, increasingly esoteric and onomantic, given to the deployment of gematric and astrological techniques, and often enmeshed with Sufi movements and Sufi-inspired revolts¹⁵ but not confined to these, as there are similar texts authored by or attributed to, among others, the philosophers al-Kindī and Ibn Sinā (Avicenna).¹⁶ This genre was often implicitly associated with imminent apocalyptic expectations, including works written and movements witnessed under the Ottoman Empire, such as the Jewish messianism of Sabbatai Sevi, al-Barzanjī's contemporary,¹⁷ a movement which inspired alarm in Muslim circles, and interpreted by Muslim authorities as one involving the suspicion that the *Dajjāl*, the Antichrist, had appeared. For Sabbataians, the appearance of Sabbatai and his announcement of his messianic character betokened the reversion of universal kingship to the Israelites, and resulted in energetic response by Ottoman authorities.¹⁸ This took place at a time, of course, when Protestant Europe itself was awash with eschatological imaginings (the connection between the two is a matter of perpetual controversy), not to speak of the eschatological mobilization that accompanied the genesis, consolidation, and institutes of the Safavids of Iran, neighbors and enemies of the Ottomans.¹⁹

Be that as it may, the literary genre under discussion contains a wide variety of narrative modes and thematic components, and cannot admit of a restrictive definition or of a "master paradigm."²⁰ The genre—here defined thematically as apocalyptic and eschatology—does take *hadīth* narratives as its primary materials, but these themselves are

of various natures with regard to content and to narrative mode, and range in their method of presentation from the sheer tabulation of discrete and sometimes inconsistent narrative elements with few composite accounts, as generally but not exclusively in Nu‘aym, to more elaborate commentary, topical classification, and finally, with al-Barzanjī, to systematic and sequential arrangement along the axis of time, in such a way that this sequence parallels that of the unfolding of past and future history. In this sense, the history of the future and the history of realized, proleptic eschatology in the past operates according to the conventions of historical writing based on the techniques of *hadīth* criticism, with the difference that, instead of using a strict and punctilious chronometric arrangement of events, as in the great annalistic history of al-Tabarī (d. 923), the arrangement of events takes the form of a seriality to which the measures of the chronometer is incidental.

Thus we see in the trajectory of Muslim apocalyptic literature from Nu‘aym to al-Barzanjī a movement towards greater systematization, towards the imposition of increasingly greater degrees of consistency and sequentiality, by the management of inconsistency and internal incongruity, towards the eventual production of all-encompassing narratives, first at the hand of Ibn Kathīr as a supplement to his universal history entitled *The Beginning and the End*, whose supplement is entitled *The End of the Beginning and the End* (comprising apocalypticism and eschatology),²¹ and later at the hand of Barzanjī. All in all, and as indicated above, the purpose of the genre was the performance a pietist and quietist logolatric ritual of veneration for the Prophet: Ibn Kathīr quite plainly stated that his history of the future was designed to supplement, with the continuous reconfirmation of prophecy, his earlier consideration, in the section of his universal history where the Muhammadan biography is treated, of the Prophet’s miracles,²²—including foretelling the future—which, in the Muslim conception, act as the tokens, proofs, and divine confirmations of his prophetic status. Nu‘aym opened his work with a *hadīth* concerning Muhammad’s afternoon speech in which he detailed all that was to come (NF, §§ 1 and *passim*) and, in a different register, al-Tabarī reaffirmed the historically omniscient capacities of Muhammad.²³ It is in this sense that this genre may be regarded as a scholarly and pietist convention rather than as a mode of activist mobilization.

Yet the thematic elements that came to compose this genre from its very inception were not all born of the imagination, but integrated into the register of proleptic eschatology factual and other elements that had once pertained to apocalyptic movements, most particularly but not

exclusively elements from the palaeo-Islamic and early Islamic periods, that is, from the first century-and-a-half of Muslim history, which witnessed civil wars often fought under the signature of messianic restorations of the Muhammadan order (later transmuted into the register of the future, as eschatological expectations²⁴), and messianic revolts, no less than the messianic impulses associated with Muhammad himself and with the coming of the Abbasids and the complex reign of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn.²⁵ These ran parallel to the steady contemporary production of Christian and Manichaean apocalypses, and were clearly related to the eventual reassertion of Zoroastrian eschatological lore, built upon Avestan materials, that took final shape in the ninth and tenth centuries.²⁶

This material would include above all—here as in apocalyptic convention—divinely-inspired pronouncements, in addition to sibylline statements, oracular visions, stenographic allusions, the use of symbols and allegories, heavily symbolized and dilated indications of time-scales, allusive and symbolic keys to the geographic locations of events to come, motifemic, legendary, and mythological elements, *mirabilia*, protological statements detailing elements from the typological history of prophecy and eschatology from Adam to the Mahdī, and references to layers of belief, including apocalyptic lore, that were later to be discarded with the crystallization of classical Muslim traditions—and indeed other features of early narratives which help in their dating. Examples that might be cited of the last mentioned element is the reference to Jerusalem as 'Īliyā—Aelea—in connection with the Second Coming of Jesus during the forthcoming time of the Mahdī (NF, 1333 and *passim*), and the reference to a fifth Heraclid during whose reign in Constantinople eschatological battles signaling the end of the world will take place (NF, 1223).²⁷ All these elements were, in the context of the genre under consideration, domesticated and contained for the purposes of the genre as discussed above.²⁸

Some of these elements were combined in the works under consideration in the reproduction of integral texts of particular apocalypses properly so-called (for instance: NF, 1482, 1496, and *passim*), which are thematically and mythologically congruent with Late Antique apocalyptic texts Pagan and Christian, most notably the crucially important Apocalypse of the Pseudo-Methodius,²⁹ despite the extreme rarity of references Biblical apocalyptic personalities in the Koran.³⁰ This is a comparison which cannot, unfortunately, be undertaken in the present compass, although specific and more general points of comparability will be evident in what follows. It is perhaps noteworthy that the scheme

of four world-empires which was an important element within these antecedent traditions is not evident in Muslim apocalyptic writing, though it does appear in secular Muslim historical writing. Thus profound mythological and motifemic continuities between Muslim apocalyptic *hadīth* and the Late Antique heritage can be signaled, and their domestication can also help us in determining the point at which, in this particular sector, the history of Islam became disengaged from that of late Antiquity and instituted a register of continuity all of its own, despite references in classical and medieval Muslim material to a variety of pseudepigraphic pre-Islamic material under the generic name of *The Book of Daniel* (for instance, NF, 1338).

Finally, I should like to stress that, in speaking of domestication by means of ejecting any notion of imminence to the apocalypse, thereby transforming its activist elements into a textualist pietism for the Muslim priestly elite in societies severely albeit not rigidly stratified, I do not wish to imply in any definitive way that such exclusion of imminence is somehow necessarily allied to defensive postures in times of crisis, however a crisis may be defined. Neither do I imply correlatively that imminence is asserted by the disenfranchised, although this was indeed sometimes the case. I should rather like to affirm that not all the purposes of the apocalyptic genre are apocalyptic. As some recent detailed historical research on apocalypticism has shown, and contrary to certain pietistic, sentimentalist or impressionistic assertions to the contrary,³¹ there is no necessary correlation between misery, crisis, and apocalypse, and no specific social or historical setting for the emergence of the genre, not least for the point being made *a contrario*, that seemingly minor dislocations have sometimes provoked disproportionate responses, and that major conflagrations did not provoke apocalyptic responses when such were available.³² Nu'aym, for one, was a quietist who stressed pious caution during calamitous times, in keeping with his milieu, very much unlike the eschatological milieus and sentiments that animated certain peasant revolts of his time.³³

* * *

It is now time to take a closer look at the systematization of Muslim apocalypticism: the process that witnessed the construction of a sequential and connected narrative of the history of past and present, in such a way that the former is inscribed in the register of the latter, bereft of its specific historicity, of its *Vergangenheit*, and relegated to the status of prophecy already accomplished, of *vaticinium ex eventu*. This accounts for the past as past in the future anterior only, being a future

prophetically foretold at the time of the inception of prophecy, a future following its pronouncement or its writing, by Muhammad, by Nu'aym, or by al-Barzanjī, and indeed already inscribed by the first demiurgical act of God Himself, when He commanded the Pen to inscribe the course of His creation onto the Tablet which stands eternally at the foot of His Throne.³⁴ The Tablet, the register of the divine command, is the atemporal locus of the achronic continuum which combines together the projection and retrojection of times past and future, which are so separated into past and future and made chronometric only to mundane human experience, but not to the perspective of eternity—for as al-Barzanjī tells us, the world was not created for perpetuity, but is merely a moment or a station (*manzil min manāzil*) of the End (BI, 3). Both past and future therefore exist together in the medium of a duration indeterminate as to its chronological measure and as to the rhythms and divisions of historical becoming, forming together part of what the Arabic lexicon knows and accounts for as *al-dahr* sheer duration³⁵—a conception reminiscent of many other places and times, and characteristic of monotheism, most eloquently and limpidly expressed by St. Augustine, who proposed that the unchangeable mind of God embraced the innumerable possibilities of history without needing to pass them in sequence before His mind.³⁶

The past in the mode of *vaticinium ex eventu* is a past-future, in the sense that its sense is a sense to come expressed in the future tense, and a future already realized; together past and future constitute the predetermined past of the End and the predetermined future of the Beginning. What remained at the time of writing—by Nu'aym or al-Barzanjī—is the rest of a future whose sum-total, whose entire sequence, belongs to a past of the End which is past only virtually, merely in terms of the human experience of time, an experience which is entirely distinct from the time of divinity pronounced by the Prophet as a before and as an after: the history of prophecy preceding him, and the long eschatological period intervening between him and the End.

Al-Barzanjī continues the two registers of prophesied past accomplished and prophesied future to be accomplished, in a form rendered all the more systematic by the passage of ten centuries replete with Signs of the End. The chronometric measure of this period was irrelevant. Nu'aym at the beginning of our story had assembled assorted Traditions ascribed to the Prophet concerning the timing of the End without much consequence, most of these timings having lapsed by his own lifetime, and arising out of a variety of apocalypses and eschatological expectations: a hundred years, 167 years and 31 days, 125 years,

the typological figure of 300 years congruent with the time-span of the Israelites, and others (NF, 1445 ff., 1480). The mainstream of Sunnism was particularly resistant to this kind of specification, and indeed the specification of the overall duration of the world, which had over many centuries been associated with astrological and numerological apocalypses characteristic of certain insurrectionary movements and Sufi mystagogues. Sunnism—for all its internal variety—generally resorted to ascribing such specifications to People of the Book,³⁷ and to a variety of interpretive procedures made all the much more available by other Traditions in which time appears distorted as to its measure by dilation and contraction. The days of the Dajjāl for instance, are said to be forty: a day measuring a year, a day measuring less, yet another measuring a month and yet another measuring less, and so on until there come days that “pass as does fire in a stack of hay,” with a man entering the gate of the city at sunrise and exiting another gate at sunset (NF, 1327), or indeed a day as a year, another as a month, yet another as a week, and the rest passing as ordinary days, otherwise forty days or forty months or forty years.³⁸

In all, the End is determined not so much by a chronometric measure, but by the passage of Signs that are prophesied to occur in proper sequence. This sense of abidance and of unspecified expectation dominated the genre all the way until the time of al-Barzanjī, who chose the figure of two centuries which, among others, had been pronounced by the Prophet as the life-span of his (Muslim) people, and speculated that this admits of interpretation as 200 years after the passing of the first Muslim millennium. He consequently made the practically irrelevant prediction that the terminus would not exceed the 1200 A.H., corresponding to A.D. 1785 (BI, 105–6), at a respectable and speculative remove from his own time, a period which was to include the passing of the political, natural, and cosmic conflagrations and subversions of order that were merely to complete eschatological Signs already accomplished.

The Signs to come occasionally had, as to their chronometric measure, to be made to synchronise with each other in order to produce a consistent narrative. Thus of the 40 or 24 or 19 or seven years allocated for the reign of the Mahdī, these might be considered from different beginnings pertaining to this eschatological figure: seven years from the beginning of his universal world dominion, 19 years from the time he kills al-Sufyānī (a figure akin in some respects to the Dajjāl, but of only local and no universal significance), 24 years following his exit from Syria, and 40 years from the start of his dominion overall (BI,

159–61). It seems reasonable to suppose that this and similar procedures as are to be found in al-Barzanjī and elsewhere are applied as part of a protocol of trimming, a hypertrophy of officious application to material indubitably established, rather than with a mind to any form of innovation or of the development of the material at hand. For what was crucially to be established, even though this establishment was never to be impeccable due to the variegated nature of the material at hand, was not a chronology, as we have seen, but rather a chronography, a certain order of succession in which Signs past and future are not in essence to be distinguished, their distinction being purely phenomenological, and it is to these that I will now turn.

It transpires from what has been said that history, as the succession of events experienced by mankind, is complete *ab initio*, and that its closure is expressed in the continuum between eschatological prophecy already realized and the remains of this realization, biding their human time and expectation, in such a way that the past is subsumable in the apocalyptic future and forms part of its register. al-Barzanjī was well-aware of this, and expressed it in the manner in which he organized his treatise into three sections corresponding to the chronographic status of apocalyptic Signs in them: Signs past, Signs intermediate and continuing, and Signs to come.

It is a tribute to al-Barzanjī's complete disassociation from any notion of historicity that virtually the entire history of Islam up to his own time is comprehended in the Signs of the first moment indicated, that of time already run its predetermined course. Seemingly mundane events—and a volume of post-classical events unusual for the genre—are accentuated beyond the requirements of events in mundane time, and apprehended as wonders read as Signs and frequently, albeit not always, attached to interpretations of prophetic pronouncements. The whole of Muslim history is a process of winding down towards the End, and is in the salvation historical and pietistic modes regarded as the action of the essentially degenerative and egressive nature of all time following prophecy. In this process, al-Barzanjī like other authors incorporated into the *ex eventu* register materials posterior to those present in the canonical texts, just as the canonical authors had incorporated materials as yet uncanonized and canonized in the process.

Thus the sequential register of these signs commences with the death of the Prophet, followed by the significant events of palaeo-islamic and early Muslim history: the murder of 'Umar and 'Uthmān, the Battles of the Camel and of Siffin, the reign of Yazīd and the death of al-Husayn, the Second Civil War, and various misdeeds of the Umayyads who, it

must be said, and in keeping with Sunni judgements upon history, are not condemned wholesale, but are regarded to have been errant (BI, 5-50, and see NF, 71-104, 572 ff.). Not distinguishing between long and short events, al-Barzanjī then pronounces the mundane course of history as a bundle of Signs: the coming of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty, the death of Muhammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and of Mūsa al-Kāzim, the imprisonment of Ja‘far al-Sādiq, the temporary triumph of Mu‘tazilist theology under al-Ma’mūn and al-Mu‘tasim, the coming of the Fātimid state, the Qarmatī movement, and the Mongols (BI, 51-60)—the last being, in appearance, corresponding to the way in which the Prophet, in a famous *hadīth*, described the Turks, as having faces “akin to moulded shields (*ka’l mijān al-mutarraqa*)” (BI, 55). The author’s reference to unspecified evil in Shiraz may well have been intended as a reference to the contemporary Safavids, and, if so, would appear to be the only contemporary reference he made (BI, 61-3).

In a parallel register, a number of sundry Signs are cited, most importantly, the appearance of prototypes of the Dajjāl: Muhammad’s erstwhile Arabian competitors in prophecy, Maslama b. Habib (here given the usual derogatory diminutive Musaylima) and al-Aswad al-‘Ansī, in addition to insurrectionary apocalyptic figures such as Yahyā b. Zikrawayh, as well as others in Iraq, Persia, and the Maghreb (BI, 67-73). His register also includes the waning of Arab dominion with the decline and eventual disappearance of the Abbasids (BI, 74), the interruptions of pilgrimage routes to Mecca at several points in the fourth and fifth centuries of the Hijra (BI, 85-6), as well as Signs of positive value, most notably the three-fold conquest of Jerusalem under ‘Umar, Saladin, and Saladin’s grandson (BI, 73).

Al-Barzanjī does not omit to mention cosmic, marvelous, and meteorological Signs, all part of the gnomic and visionary eschatological lore attributed to the Prophet. He therefore offers his reader what may be regarded as a geological history of Muslim lands, detailing earthquakes, a history of extraordinary climatic phenomena like storms, hail storms, and sand storms, followed by a history of droughts, heat waves, and consequent famine and inflationary phenomena (BI, 75-85), another of the appearance of comets, and yet another of pestilence (BI, 87-99), without failing to mention extraordinary meteorological phenomena and miraculous phenomena that reinforced the resonant moment and the eschatological significance of certain Signs he cited, such as eclipses, floods, and transmogrifications (BI, 58-60, 78-9—cf. NF, 221 ff., 467 ff., 487 ff., 510 ff., 532 ff.).

It might safely be assumed that the rest of past history was relegat-

ed by al-Barzanjī to the register of dissipative time, an absurd time without consequence for the chronography of eschatology already realized. Yet this same dissipative time, which crosses over into the moment of intermediate Signs that was still to be beheld during the author's time, is yet laden with manifestations of evil that underline the degenerative effect of time altogether and which lead, in an inexorable fashion, to the End. Thus these Signs of the intermediate moment are said to be in a process of accentuation until they reach consummation with the End (BI, 106): the exercise of public authority by the foolish and the base, the marginalization of the honest, hypocritical piety, the spread of the habit of drinking alcoholic beverages, the increasing incidence of homosexuality, disobedience of parents, rule of husbands by wives, disrespect for learning, anisogamous marriages, belief in astrology, sodomisation of women, denial of predestination, ornamenting mosques as if they were churches, return to royalist habits and institutes and the wearing of crowns, the illumination of Koranic manuscripts (BI, 106–27), the spectacle of women on horseback, rhymed with dubious wit as *rukūb dhawāt al-furūj as-surūj* (BI, 122)—antino-mian women were ever present as signs of the End.³⁹

In all, we have here the common pietistic discourse on *fasād al-zamān*,⁴⁰ corruption of the present time. It contains the familiar polemic against the inversion of order and the restatement of aversion to social life as actually experienced in the fullness of its transformations. The elements of this polemic are here fully recuperated into the apocalyptic register,⁴¹ where they are regarded as a progressively aggravating condition, congenital to time as a degenerative and dissipative medium. This gradual but manifest degeneration is expected to be consummated with the trials, tribulations and calamities that will follow and that will presage the End, for this degenerative passage to the End is a steady state, albeit one weighted and inflected towards a self-evident End, with no major Signs expected except for those which are associated with the coming of the Mahdī. His appearance will be followed by a number of battles against sundry figures, culminating in their prototype, al-Dajjāl, who will be fought in alliance with Jesus.⁴² The latter's *parousia* will be descent upon the white eastern minaret of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, when he appears as a decidedly martial figure.⁴³ Then follow the world-historical battles which will lead to the conquests of Constantinople and of Rome, the cleansing of the world and the restoration of the Adamic order, the depredations of Gog and Magog and their eventual destruction, calamitous earth-falls, the Fire of Aden to be seen from all corners of the earth, the rise of the sun from the

west, the appearance of the Beast (*al-dābba*), the sounding of the Trumpet, the death of the rest of humanity as of all the angels by command of God, followed by the Resurrection (*al-qiyāma*, *al-ba'th wa'l-nushūr*), the apportioning of salvation and damnation, and finally the habitation forever of Paradise (*al-janna*) and of Hell (*al-jahīm*, or simply: The Fire, *al-nār*).⁴⁴

The account by al-Barzanjī of the Mahdī (BI, 132–59) follows earlier accounts (NF, 620 ff.), but lends them a greater degree of cogency, and resolves the prior uncertainty over the chronographic relationship between the Mahdī and Jesus, and indeed the question of their possible identity, by asserting that the former appears first.⁴⁵ The mahdist appearance itself is presaged by preparatory signs: the almost simultaneous and repeated eclipses of the sun and the moon, the frequent appearance of comets, the splitting of the Euphrates and the emergence from it of a mountain of gold.

The Mahdī is a typological figure for prophecy and with accounts of him (as of his main foe, the Dajjāl) we move from sparse accounts of folktales to detailed description of myth. The Mahdī will have a straight nose and black eyes, with a luminous spot on his right cheek; he will be thickly bearded, distinguished by the heaviness of his tongue, and will be aged 40, like a mature Israelite. He will be the Prophet's namesake, named Muhammad b. 'Abd Allāh, born of the line of Fātima (for other genealogies, from 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and from al-'Abbās: NF, 1038, 1044), with the somatic sign of prophecy between his shoulders, wearing the Prophet's mantle and carrying his sword and his standard. He will be given an acclamation of allegiance (*bay'a*), attended by 315 Syrians (the number of men commanded by Muhammad at the Battle of Badr) like the Prophet and Caliphs after him, in Mecca between al-Rukn and al-Maqām on the hallowed night of *al-qadr*. He will make Jerusalem his seat of government, will rule the whole world according to the world-historical and universalist model of royalty—an important apocalyptic motif overall⁴⁶—as had Alexander and Solomon before him, returning life to its original and pristine state of normalcy, removing adultery, pestilence, drinking, and usury, providing for conditions that would allow a sheep safely to keep the company of a wolf, and such as children may safely play with serpents and scorpions.

Yet this Cogcaienesque idyll will be disturbed. The Sufyānī will appear and enter Damascus with 360 horsemen, and will be aided by 30,000 Kalbites, as will other adversaries in Egypt and the Mesopotamia and the Maghreb, all of whom are finally defeated in wars that involve the Romans (the Byzantines), and end with the slaying of the Sufyānī

in Jerusalem after a period of injustice and iniquity, during which adultery will be committed even on the minbars of mosques. The Mahdī's triumph will be followed by wars with the Romans, in which the archangels Gabriel and Michael come to his aid, each of them commanding 200,000 angels, as they had previously aided Muhammad at the Battle of Badr. With the defeat of the Romans after a spectacular betrayal, Constantinople will be taken by the Mahdī's armies, followed by the conquest of Rome, and the retrieval of Ur-prophetic emblems: the Ark of the Covenant (in one version, this is extracted from Antioch), the cloak of Adam, the minbar of Solomon, and the remnants of the Manna sent to the Israelites by God near Mount Sinai, the original Torah revealed to Moses, and the original Gospel revealed to Jesus (cf. NF, 969)—both since their revelation subjected to *tahrīf*, to adulteration, according to the standard Muslim view of the history of religions.

Next emerges al-Dajjāl (BI, 185–202), the Antichrist *per se*. Noah and all other prophets before and after him had adverted their people of his coming,⁴⁷ and he had been sighted, according to sailors in the Indian Ocean, chained to a rock,⁴⁸ like Prometheus, awaiting his appointed time. He is one-eyed, and his legs are arched. He starts his career of 40 years (with different computations of the figure “40”) three years after the fall of Constantinople, with a dissimulating reign of equity and religious rectitude, performing all manner of miracles to mystify and seduce his followers, such as causing the sun to stop in its path, causing the sky to rain and the earth to bloom, showing images of Heaven and Hell, and bringing the dead back to life. He then ravages the earth—except for the two holiest cities of Mecca, to which Muslims everywhere direct their prayer prostrations, and Medina, where the Prophet Muhammad is buried—aided and abetted by a complement of 70,000 Jews from Isfahan, women, and assorted evil-doers, miscreants and malcontents, while Jesus descends onto the white minaret at the Great Mosque in Damascus (BI, 216 ff.),⁴⁹ breaks the cross, kills all pigs, marries, leads the faithful in prayer, and commands them to engage and destroy the al-Dajjāl and his hordes at Lydda in battles in which he appears endowed with the power to cause his adversaries' swords to melt, as salt does in water or metal in a forge, by the sheer projection of his gaze (NF, 1333). He abolished *dhimma*, converts the world to the true religion of Islam, which, after all, is in the register of typology, his true religion, being the primeval religion of all prophets, one which therefore consummates and truly fulfils his prophethood—the history of prophecy in Muslim salvation history (and I speak here of *risāla*, apostolic prophecy, confined to Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and

Muhammad, as distinct from *nubuwwa*, merely visionary prophecy, which the four prophets mentioned share with many others) is a movement of *Aufhebung*, in which later prophecies, and last of all the prophecy of Muhammad, confirms, fulfils, augments, consummates, and transcends earlier ones, but does not ordinarily deny them in their graduated and cumulative succession, except when the glimmerings of the End betoken the last transcendence of all things past.

Be that as it may, the time of Jesus is described in terms similar to those used for describing the mahdist idyll, with the earth reverting to the way it was “at the beginning” (NF, 1334) or at the time of Adam,⁵⁰ though his personal appearance is different to that of the Mahdī, he being red-haired and broad-chested, and the relationship between the two appears uncertain and very confused in its details. They are assumed to work in concert, although some Traditions report that the Mahdī will already be dead by the time al-Dajjāl appears. He will remain for seven or 19 or 40 years of uncertain chronometric value after the defeat of the al-Dajjāl, and upon his death will be interred in the Prophet’s burial chamber.⁵¹ Meanwhile, the Mahdī is assumed to have died, and the earth seems to be no longer in need of Kingship (NF, 234, 1334), just as Kingship appears to Byzantine apocalypses to be no longer necessary once the Last Emperor turns over his crown to Jesus at Golgotha.

For the rest of what remains of the world, a succession of chaotic Signs will still be in waiting (NF, 1071; BI, 231 ff.). The Gate of Alexander breaks and the Gog and Magog are unleashed upon the world. A marginal and grotesque form of humanity approaching monstrosity, these people, of Turkic stock, are described according to the conventional mirabilia in a manner very much akin to the Blemmiae, and were the subject of much ethnological attention.⁵² They will destroy all before them, and drink the river Euphrates dry, before they are destroyed by a foul wind sent by God. Their destruction is followed by geological upheavals and by the appearance of the fearsome preternatural Beast of the Apocalypse, *al-dābba*,⁵³ a hybrid of many animal forms which pursues what remains of humanity and, reading their hearts, piercingly pronounces them believers or unbelievers. This will be the last terrestrial Sign of the End,⁵⁴ for what follows are all extra-terrestrial occurrences, most notably the rise of the sun from the west, after which occurrence no repentance will any longer be accepted by God,⁵⁵ All that then remains is for God to cause the death of all remaining humanity after the call of the Archangel Isrāfil’s trumpet,⁵⁶ followed by that of the angels and by the Resurrection and the final reckoning.⁵⁷

Al-Barzanjī speaks of the fall of Constantinople as an event still to come, describing it in the terms familiar to medieval Arab geography as a city called Būzantiya in Romish (Greek), with a long rectangular cathedral, city walls 21 yards high, and a statue of Constantine with a golden orb in his hand (BI, 150–5). Yet what had been Constantinople is the city in which he had spent time. Still, its fall as he knew of it had not followed the appearance of the Mahdī, for Mehmet the Conqueror was clearly no Mahdi to him. The fall of Constantinople to a Muslim power had not occurred according to the manner prophesied, and it was no longer, in his time, ruled by the Romans, though the Ottoman Sultans added *kaiser-i Rum* (Caesar of the Romans) to their regal titles. Its fall therefore, in the register of sacred chronography, could not be presumed to have taken place except to the virtual and mundane perception of humans, just like the messianic character of Barzanjī's contemporary Ottoman "compatriot" Sabbatai Sevi who had, by his eventual conversion in Istanbul to Islam, proven himself to be a false Messiah.

It would not be just to say that there had been a tension between visionary and temporal realities, a tension which would have prompted our author to attempt yet another apologetic strategy to close the gap between predictions and happenings. While the event may require interpretation in order to fit in the chronography of prediction, it cannot contradict prophecy, most particularly in an order which is not equivalent to that of mundane events, despite the incorporation of the sequence of these events within it. In such incorporation, the event loses its mundane quality and is incorporated into an order of events which is wholly distinctive, belonging to a distinctive—but chronometrically parallel—order of sequence whose constituent elements (the events) are made to belong by being transposed from time dissipative to time aggregative and salvational, inscribed in a different order, that of *al-dahr*.

To the pietistic imagination, the degenerative, eggressive distance between the order of perfection—the perfection of radically imperfect reality as highlighted by prophecy and authenticated by correspondence between reality and prophecy—and the imperfect order of dissipative time, amounts quite simply to an ontological distinction, indeed disjunction, between truth and falsity, reality and appearance, two orders between which correspondence is impossible. Istanbul belongs to dissipative time, Constantinople-Būzantia to an atotopical and atemporal salvational time, and the former cannot be conceived as capable of belying the latter, for temporal and mundane relations cannot be

seen to fetter the order of Signs. The ontological load of the event is conferred by the *vaticinium*, which confers upon it the status of Sign, in a disjunctive relation to the mundane order of events in the medium of which it arose.

The seamlessness of the transition between past and future Signs arises precisely out of this disjunctive detachment of mundanity, from this radical transposition to the register of *al-dahr*. Whereas historical past and historical future are connected by a movement from the one to the other, the perspective of quietist eschatology rests on the elision of movement and posits instead a translation bereft of a medium in which such a movement might take place. Events past and future are here components in a topological arrangement of elements that is still to find completion, and the future is to the present as it is to the past, figuring as the completion of requisite parts whose connection is one of mapping, not of kinesis.

It is perhaps unsurprising in this perspective that the absence of a socially relevant notion of imminence to the Signs of the future yields, by the same token, to the absence of socially relevant perceptions of events past that might not be regarded as Signs. Fatalist eschatology and eschatology as conventional are inseparable: both devolve the sense and purpose of eschatology from the world-historical scheme of beginning, decline, and re-enactment and reversion to origins to the piety of the individual, ponderously awaiting the advent of an uncertain moment, and subsuming apocalypse within the bounds of traditionalist convention. Both arise from the corporatist convention of a social body (the '*ulamā*') that from around the 12th century, in the central lands of Islam, crystallized institutionally and declared its moral and monocratic guardianship of the laity in alliance with and as functionaries of a sultanic state⁵⁸ across many centuries of a long medieval Muslim period.

Both lodge themselves within the atemporal time of the canon which, in this particular Sunni sultanic inflection, detaches itself deliberately from more richly textured and more finely articulated conceptions of history available;⁵⁹ a time whose movement is anticipated and assimilated by the immeasurability *al-dahr*, by the simultaneity of divine purposes and of the divine perception of history. There is indeed no better guide to this divine *ratio* than St. Augustine:

It is not that there is any difference in God's knowledge according as it is produced by things not yet in existence, by things now or by things that are no more. Unlike us, He does not look ahead to the future, see

the present before him, and look back to the past. Rather he sees events in another way, far and profoundly different from any experience that is familiar to our minds. For he does not variably turn his attention from one thing to another ... Hence all events in time, events that will be and are not yet and those that are now, being present, and those that have passed and are no more, all of them are apprehended by him in a motionless and everlasting present moment ... Nor does it make any difference whether he looks at them from present, past or future, since his knowledge, unlike ours, of the three kinds of time, present, past and future, does not change as time changes.

He continues, speaking for the apocalyptic perspective in general, including that of al-Barzanjī: “Neither does [God’s] attention stray from one subject to another (...) for he knows events in time without any temporal acts of knowing of his own.”⁶⁰

Notes

- ¹ I am grateful for comments from the participants at the workshop on "History's Visions of the Future" held at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, during the period 8–9 June, 2001, and another on Temporalities in Context, held at the Central European University, Budapest, on 28–29 November, 2003.
- ² The reader might be referred to A. Al-Azmeh, "Civilization, Concept of," in *The International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, q.v.; and idem, "Genealogie, Typologie und Organismus," in *Kontinuität und Wandel. Geschichtsbilder in verschiedenen Fächern und Kulturen*, ed. E. Schulz and W. Sonne, Zurich, 1999, pp. 453–87.
- ³ For instance: Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Geschichte, Kultur und die Suche nach dem Organischen," in *Die Vielfalt der Kulturen: Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität* 4, ed. J. Rüsen, M. Gottlob, and A. Mittag, Frankfurt, 1998, pp. 74–114 (this book, ch. 1), M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London, 1972, "Introduction."
- ⁴ St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* [Loeb Classical Library 413], 11:21.
- ⁵ A. Al-Azmeh, "Chronophagous Discourse" in *Religion and Practical Reason*, ed. F. E. Reynolds and D. Tracy, Albany, 1994, pp. 163–211 (this book, ch. 3).
- ⁶ 'A. al-'Azma, *al-Kitāba al-tārikhiyya wa'l ma'rifa al-tārikhiyya*, 2nd ed., Beirut, 1995, ch. 3; A. Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, London, 1997, pp. 41 ff., 190 ff.; idem, "Geschichte, Kultur und die Suche nach dem Organischen," G. Fowden, "Eusebius and Ibn Ishaq" (unpub. mimeo); A. S. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, Chicago, 1984.
- ⁷ On whom see J. Aguadé, *Messianismus zur Zeit der frühen Abbasiden: Das Kitāb al-fitan des Nu'aim Ibn Hammād*, doctoral dissertation, University of Tübingen, 1979, pp. 8 ff.
- ⁸ Ibid., pp. 43–4.
- ⁹ Ibid., pp. 35 ff., on the distinctive positions of Nu'aym and of Ibn Hanbal during this Persecution.
- ¹⁰ Nu'aym b. Hammād, *al-Fitan* [Apocalyptic Calamities], ed. M. B. Sayyid al-Shūrā, Beirut, 1997 (henceforth: NF).
- ¹¹ Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Rasūl al-Barzanjī, *Kitāb al-Ishā'a li-Ashrāt al-Sā'a* [Proclamations of the Final Hour], ed. M. B. Na'sānī, Cairo, 1907 (henceforth: BI).
- ¹² Still in manuscript form at the British Library. See the conspectus of al-Sha'rānī: *Mukhtasar al-tadhkira al-Qurtubiya*, Cairo, A.H. 1302 [1884].
- ¹³ J. Le Goff, *Un autre moyen âge*, Paris, 1999, pp. 447 ff.
- ¹⁴ The literature is vast and very uneven in quality. Suffice it here to refer to the following: W. A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, Paris and The Hague, 1977; A. Neuwirth, "Vom Rezitationstext über Liturgie zum Kanon," in *The Qur'an as Text*, ed. S. Wild, Leiden, 1987, pp. 69–105; B. M. Wheeler, *Applying the Canon in Islam. The Authorization and Maintenance of Interpretive Reasoning in Hanafi Scholarship*, Albany, 1996; A. Al-Azmeh, "The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism," in *Canonization and Decanonization*, ed. A. van der Kooij and K. van den

- Toorn, Leiden, 1998, pp. 193–213 (this book, ch. 4.); H. Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*, London, 2000. See also P. Legendre, *L'amour du censeur*, Paris, 1974; "Tradition," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 6, ed. R. Koselleck et al., Stuttgart, pp. 603 ff.
- ¹⁵ See in general, T. Fahd, *La divination arabe*, Paris, 1966, pp. 224 ff.; Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 190 ff.; Ibn Khaldun, *Les prolégomènes d'Ebn Khaldoun*, ed. E. Quatremère, Paris, 1858, vol. 1, pp. 192 ff., vol. 2, pp. 168 ff.; Hajji Khalifa, *Kashf al-zunūn 'an asāmī al-kutub wa'l-funūn*, vol. 2, ed. Yaltakaya and R. Bilge, Istanbul, 1942, pp. 1812–3.
- ¹⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *Prolégomènes*, vol. 2, pp. 168, 170, 196; O. Loth, "Al-Kindi als Astrolog," in *Morgenländische Forschungen. Festschrift Heinrich L. Fleischer*, Leipzig, 1875, pp. 263–309 (Arabic text: pp. 273–9).
- ¹⁷ See G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi, the Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676*, London, 1973.
- ¹⁸ For instance, Arabic text in P. S. van Koningsveld, J. Sadan, and Q. Al-Samarrai, *Yemenite Authorities and Jewish Messianism*, Leiden, 1990, pp. 162, 163, 167; and *ibid.*, chs. 1–2, *passim*. Cf. Scholem, *Sabbatai—Sevi*, pp. 397, 426–30.
- ¹⁹ S. A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, Chicago, 1984.
- ²⁰ As for example in J. J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," in *idem* (ed.), *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Missoula, 1980 (= *Semeia* 14), pp. 4 ff.
- ²¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāyat al-bidāya wa'n-nihāya fī'l-fitan wa'l-malāhim*, 2 vols., ed. M. F. Abū 'Ubayya, Riyadh, 1968.
- ²² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 7.
- ²³ Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, 12 vols., Leiden, 1879 ff., vol. 1, pp. 416–7.
- ²⁴ W. Madelung, "Mahdi," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. 5, col. 1234.
- ²⁵ See in general, S. A. Arjomand, "Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classical Period," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 2, ed. B. McGinn, New York, 2000, pp. 248ff.; P. Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde*, Paris, 1911; *idem*, "La malhamat dans l'Islam primitif," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* LXI (1910), pp. 151–61. For the emergence of some important traditions out of particular historical experiences, see W. Madelung, "'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdi," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* XXX (1981), pp. 291–305; *idem*, "The Sufyani Between Tradition and History," *Studia Islamica* LXIII (1984), pp. 5–48; S. Bashear, "Apocalyptic and other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1991), pp. 173–207; W. F. Tucker, *Revolutionary Chiasm in Umayyad Iraq*, doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1971.
- ²⁶ A. Abel, "Changements politiques et littérature eschatologique dans le monde musulman," *Studia Islamica* II (1954); M. Moazami, "Millennianism, Eschatology, and Messianic Figures in Iranian Tradition," *Journal of Millennial Studies* Winter (2000), p. 1.
- ²⁷ See M. Cook, "The Heraclian Dynasty in Muslim Eschatology," *Al-Qantara* 13 (1992), pp. 3–23.

- ²⁸ For details of references in Nu'aym, see Aguadé, *Messianismus*, pp. 82 ff.
- ²⁹ See in general, P. J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975; idem, *The Oracle of Baalbeck: The Triburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress*, Washington, D.C., 1967; W. Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judentums, des neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche*, Göttingen, 1895; E. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen* [1898], rep. Torino, 1963; R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, Princeton, 1997, ch. 8; M. Kmosko, "Das Rätsel des Pseudo-Methodius", *Byzantion* 6 (1931), pp. 273–96; H. Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalypstik des 7. Jahrhunderts* [Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe XXIII: Theologie, Bd. 256.], Frankfurt, Bern, and New York, 1985; G. J. Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, I: Problems in the Literary Source Material* [Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam I], ed. A. Cameron and L. Conrad, Princeton, 1992, pp. 149–88; B. McGinn, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition*, Aldershot, 1994, ch. 1; A. Hultgård, "Persian Apocalypticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, ed. J. J. Collins, New York, 2000, pp. 39–83; "Antichrist," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, q.v.; J. W. Swain, "The Theory of the Four Monarchies," *Classical Philology* 35 (1940), pp. 1–21; A. Vasiliev, "Medieval Ideas of the End of the World: West and East," *Byzantion*, XVI/2 (1942–3), pp. 462–502 (to my knowledge the only text to attempt a comparison with Islamic concepts); G. Podskalsky, *Die Byzantinische Reichsideologie: Die Periodisierung der Weltgeschichte in den vier Grossreichen und dem tausendjährigen Friedensreiche*, München, 1972. It must be stressed, overall, that the extravagant claims made for the salience of Jewish apocalypticism are at best unnecessary assumptions and must be amended by the consideration that Jewish apocalypticism itself makes little sense without the Near Eastern environment from which it emerged and of which it formed a slight component quite apart from the textual as opposed to the real influence it came to have later, amidst myths and restorative apocalyptic expectations, particularly in Persian Babylonia under Macedonian rule—see the cautionary remarks of J. Collins, "From Prophecy to Apocalypticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, ed. John J. Collins, New York, 2000, pp. 133 ff.; Anders Hultgård, "Persian Apocalypticism," in *ibid.*, pp. 63 ff.; and G. J. Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, pp. 175–6, n. 116; for early apocalyptic notions, see N. Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, New Haven, 1993, part 1.
- ³⁰ Cf. Arjomand, "Islamic Apocalypticism," p. 241.
- ³¹ For instance, E. Bloch, *The Philosophy of Hope*, vol. 3, tr. N. Plaice et al., Cambridge, Mass., 1995, pp. 1126, 1132, and *passim*.
- ³² McGinn, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition*, ch. 1, pp. 15–6; L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation. Apocalypse and Empire*, New York and London, 1990, chs. 1 and 2.

- ³³ Aguadé, *Messianismus*, pp. 72 ff., 89 ff., 209 f.
- ³⁴ See for instance al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, pp. 29–30; cf. Y. Moubarac, *Abraham dans le Coran*, Paris, 1958, pp. 130–2.
- ³⁵ Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf istilāhāt al-fun*, ed. L. ‘Abd al-Badī’, Cairo, 1977, q.v.
- ³⁶ *De civitate dei*, xii:18.
- ³⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Kitāb al-fitan wa-l-malāhim*, ed. I. al-Ansāri, Riyadh, 1983, p. 20–1.
- ³⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, pp. 105, 107, 114, 167. These distensions and compressions of time take on a far more elaborate complexion, “almost calculated to defeat any controllable sense of time,” in the Great Time of Sanskrit writings on the *yugas* and *kalpas*: R. Thapar, *Time as a Metaphor of History*, in idem, *History and Beyond*, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 13 ff. In all, there are parallelisms between monotheistic conceptions of antinomianism and inversions preceding the end of time, and Brahminical construals of the fourth, terminal stage (*kaliyuga*) of each temporal cycle: *ibid.*, 21 ff.
- ³⁹ See W. Saleh, “The Female as a Locus of Apocalyptic Anxiety in Medieval Sunni Islam,” in *Myth, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature* [Beiruter Texte und Studien 64], ed. A. Neuwirth and M. Jarrar, Beirut, 1999, pp. 121–42.
- ⁴⁰ For a representative statement, see the fourteenth century text of Ibn Rajab, *Kashf al-kurba bi-wasf hal al-ghurba*, ed. J. Mādī, Alexandria, 1983; in an eschatological register: al-Sha’rānī, *Mukhtasar*.
- ⁴¹ Cf. the sparser detail in NF, 1363 and *passim*; Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, pp. 206 ff.
- ⁴² For Jesus in Muslim eschatology, see P. Mclean, *Jesus in the Qur’an and Hadith Literature*, M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1970.
- ⁴³ This is of course familiar in Christian apocalypse, and lends the figure of Christ an interesting complexity very much at variance with the dewy sentimentalism of the image projected in modern Muslim apologetics—for instance: *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, ed. and tr. with an Introduction by T. Khalidi, Cambridge, Mass., 2001.
- ⁴⁴ See the relevant articles and terms in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edition; and relevant items in J. Wensinck, *Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition*, Leiden, 1960.
- ⁴⁵ See Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, pp. 37, 45; al-Sha’rānī, *Tadhkira*, p. 144.
- ⁴⁶ See the convenient summary of Coppens’ voluminous work on the Old and New Testaments in idem, *Le messianisme royal* [*Lectio Divina* 54], Paris, 1968.
- ⁴⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, p. 110; Ahmad b. Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, 13 vols., ed. A. M. Shākir, Cairo, 1949 ff., § 1526.
- ⁴⁸ Al-Mas’ūdī, *Murūj adh-dhahab* [Les prairies d’or], 9 vols., ed. C. Barbier de Meynard and P. de Courteille, Paris, 1861 ff., vol. 4, p. 29. Cf. BI, 185 ff.
- ⁴⁹ See Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, pp. 171–2; Ibn Batūta, *Voyages d’Ibn Batoutah*, 2 vols., ed. C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti, Paris, 1893, vol. 1, p. 229.
- ⁵⁰ Al-Mutahhar b. Tāhir al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-bad’ wa’t-tārīkh*, 6 vols., ed. C. Huart and attributed to al-Balkhī, Paris, 1899 ff., vol. 2, p. 190—a most use-

ful and cogent account of the entire history of the future is sketched in *ibid.*, pp. 158–92.

⁵¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, p. 80, vol. 2, p. 99.

⁵² A. Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman*, vol. 2, Paris, 1973, pp. 497 ff.; A. Al-Azmeh, “Barbarians in Arab Eyes,” *Past and Present* 134 (1992), pp. 15 ff.

⁵³ Curiously, al-Burāq, the beast mounted by the Prophet on his nocturnal journey to Heaven is also called *al-dābba*: *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed., q.v. According to an opinion attributed to an early exegetical authority, Ibn `Abbās, this Beast of the Apocalypse is no other than the serpent that had previously guarded the idols of the Ka‘ba until, at an unspecified date, God sent an eagle that carried it off: al-Azraqi, *Akhbār Makka*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Leipzig, 1859, pp. 386–7. This mythological lore requires detailed study.

⁵⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, 194–5.

⁵⁵ For an anthropomorphic account of God’s procedure in causing the sun to rise from the west, see al-Suyūṭī (al-Barzanjī considered himself as filling a particular lacuna in this polymath’s work), *al-Hay’a al-saniyya fi’l-hay’a al-sunniyya*, ed. A.M. Heinen as *Islamic Cosmology*, Beirut and Wiesbaden, 1982, § 4:21.

⁵⁶ This is described with fearsome detail in NF, 149–50. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, p. 247.

⁵⁷ NF, 1345, 1367, quite unusually describes the resurrection of the dead as resulting from semen akin to human semen showered down by the command of God.

⁵⁸ Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 102 ff., 181 ff.

⁵⁹ The literature on this constellation of topics, of uneven quality, is growing. See L. Ammann, “Kommentiertes Literaturverzeichnis zu Zeitvorstellungen und geschichtlichem Denken in der islamischen Welt,” in *Die Welt des Islams* 37 (1997), §§ 0, 1.1 ff., 1.2.1 ff.

⁶⁰ St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* [Loeb Classical Library 413], 11:21.

CHAPTER 6

Rhetoric for the Senses: A Consideration of Muslim Paradise Narratives

That sensual pleasure in this world is praised and, indeed, enjoined in Muslim tradition when it occurs within the bounds of legitimate union, requires no demonstration. Equally evident is the discouragement of serious forms of long-term asceticism and of carnal self-denial, over and above what some Sufis might adopt during periods of initiation and devotional isolation (*khalwa*). The repudiation of pleasure characteristic of Christian traditions in general¹ is almost entirely absent, and monastic life with its various forms of physical self-immolation was frequently the object of derision by Muslim authors, who often regarded it as something contrary to what God intended for, and by, nature.

Islamic traditions thus appear to take cognizance of desire, and this recognition permeates the lines of interpretation and the uses made of Muslim Traditions in legal works, or in works of anecdotal literature, or in sententious works on piety. The pursuit of pleasure, including the supreme pleasure of the flesh, is regarded as in keeping with nature and is indeed enjoined, on account of its accord with nature, by Koranic verses and by Prophetic statements and examples.² Love (*hawā*, *'ishq*) is a natural, albeit a pathological humoral condition (melancholy) which burns blood and transforms it to atrabile, causing an inflammation of the gall bladder.³ Its only truly effective remedy is consummation,⁴ although various forms of sublimation are often suggested. Moreover, sexual pleasure preserves the species and in this capacity is a manifestation of divine grace.⁵ And whereas libertinism was always proscribed, pietistic texts, by Ghazālī (d. 1111) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) for instance, constantly repeat the contention that sexual pleasure in this world, within the confines of a legitimate union (marriage or concubinage), no matter how intense, is merely a pale foretaste of pleasure to come in Heaven, so that earthly sexual pleasure becomes a two-fold enjoyment: the actual sense of gratification, and the pleasure accruing to the imagination from the promise of indescrib-

able sexual intensity to come, of which actual worldly gratification is merely an act of anticipation.⁶

It must be stressed that writings within Muslim tradition were by and large free of sexual inhibition until Muslims came under the effect of nineteenth century European puritanism, whose moralistic repertoire was adopted in defending Islam from the polemic directed at its supposed licentiousness and sensuality. This accounts for recent, unsuccessful, attempts by al-Azhar to suppress a book by the Islamist author Muhammad Jalāl Kishk, in which the fully bisexual promise of Paradise is clearly outlined, and even the attempt by Muhammad Rashid Ridā to interpret the paradisiacal huris as indicating no more than a man's earthly wives,⁷ which matter, we will see, is contrary to both letter and spirit of Muslim traditions.

Legal works (*fiqh*) detail aspects of sexuality in clinical form, in chapters concerning ritual purity (*tahāra*) and conjugal relations. Erotic literature abounded which treated sexuality from medical, legal, and lexical and "technical" aspects, as well as the anecdotal and the pornographic. This very rich repertory of anecdotes had a particular social setting, it being in the public domain in female, male, and mixed company, although feminine participation in the latter, in this regard, was largely confined to slave girls, a public domain from which family members were excluded.⁸ Anecdotes involving purely feminine company, which abound in this literature, however, relate both to free women and slave girls. It is not surprising that one lexicographer compiled a dictionary of sexual terms in which 1083 verbal forms of coitus were listed, and the chapter concerning women in the famous *Mukhassas* of Ibn Sīdah (d. 1067) comprises of 289 terms for metonymically describing women by their sexual and temperamental aspect.⁹ A letter is preserved from the pen of the illustrious Umayyad court Secretary 'Abd al-Hamīd al-Kātib (d. 750) in which he orders the purchase of a slave girl for his master Muhammad II, and in which her specifications are detailed down to her labial characteristics.¹⁰ We detect in this one important characteristic of the discourse on sexuality in Heaven to which we will come presently, namely, that it is *grosso modo* the discourse of desire, of an insatiable desire, not the discourse of fulfillment, and that its sensual medium is vision and not touch, so that pleasure is envisioned as a desire to possess and behold delights described in conformity with the requirements of canonical notions of beauty and pleasure which are celebrated in themselves. Enjoyment of such beauty and of such pleasure as are tabulated and classified is residual in relation to possession of the capacity to behold and conceive the image

of such beauty and pleasure. In other words, the desire is desire for a narcissist spectacle, a voyeurism of one's double.

The carnality of Paradise, therefore, is in no way anomalous or peculiar, although it has presented a problem for many Western writers, occasioning a centuries-long polemic or at the very least the sanctimonious attitude of some scholars.¹¹ In medieval Muslim culture, it remained "la doctrine de la masse des fidèles à toutes les époques."¹² Even the strongly anti-anthropomorphic exegesis of the Mu'tazilite school of theology left the sensuality of these traditions largely beyond the remit of allegory or of metaphor,¹³ although an allegorizing pantheistic tendency is detectable in some mystical exegesis.¹⁴

Yet it must be stressed that the sensuality of Paradise in Muslim tradition is by no means entirely carnal, for the pleasures of Paradise are polymorphous and engage all the senses,¹⁵ although genital carnality is a pronounced element. Overall, the textual volume occupied by genital desire in the repertoire of Muslim traditions on Paradise does not justify exaggeration, although the prurient curiosity of countless generations of Muslims and of Europeans has rendered to it a centrality which is not entirely deserved. Genital desire is one of many delights, but an integral part of the catalogue of the ultimate delights which is Paradise according to Muslim tradition. Like other delights—of the palate, of redolence, of posture, of the ear, of delightful colors and shapes—carnal delights are described according to a canon which imagines the unimaginable, delights in beholding it, and glories in the possibility of possessing it and of endlessly repeating its possession and enjoyment, which is endless, because the desire is endless. As we shall see, matters heavenly are all described according to an economy of sumptuousity whose measure is infinite.

The body of Traditions (*hadīth*) on Paradise is rather small, and seems to have crystallized by the ninth century. It comprises a number of distinct topics—paradisiacal geography and toponymy, soil and vegetation, architecture; the condition of blessedness, including carnal pleasures and the sumptuousity of victuals and provisions; and ceremonial, including the Beatific Vision. Each is described by a number of distinct Traditions (*hadīth*) of sparse and rather crude narrative construction, which are of wide incidence and which seldom diverge; they are perhaps most systematically put together in the consolidated treatise *Al-Durar al-hisān* [The Comely Jewels] by al-Suyūṭī (d. 1506), which relates them after narrative of Muslim necrology, eschatology, apocalypse, and Hell, with which they are normally associated. The precise history of this limited repertoire of paradisiacal narratives has

not as yet been the topic of any studies known to the present author, and the material is used in the following pages in the original form in which it occurs in traditionalist discourses, as discrete narratives, and it is indeed as discrete narratives or points of detail that this material is used in compilations of Tradition (*hadīth*) and in Koranic exegesis, the two textual locations to which it originally belongs. It is moreover their being discrete narratives that renders them apposite for traditionalist discourses, which, by their very nature, weave this material within their textures in such a way as to make that texture appear as if it were exclusively begotten by this body of canonical material, with minimal authorial voice. It is out of such discursive textures that connected narratives of Heaven (as of Hell) are made.

The paragraphs to follow have the limited aim of making visible from narrative Traditions of paradisiacal libidinousness a general physiognomy of this textual material. This puts forth what is essentially a textualization of the imagination, a textualization which renders pleasure rhetorical and constitutes a rhetoric of pleasure, and sets forth a reduction of pleasure and of virtue, as one might witness in an utopian text, to sets of representative figures of pleasure and of virtue. In all, one witnesses a description of Paradise, as of utopia, as if one were inspecting it under the guise of an Intourist Guide, as Northrop Frye aptly remarked.¹⁶ Overall, we have before us material amenable to analysis such as a celebrated one undertaken of the social, pornographic, and homiletic utopias of Fourier, de Sade, and Loyola, from which resulted the disengagement of Sadean pornography as being not so much a discourse sustained on amorous acts, but the “tissue of erotic figures, cut up and combined like rhetorical figures of the written discourse.”¹⁷ Formal parallels with science fiction, thrillers, and folktales will be readily discernible.

There are, of course, many other ways of handling this textual material with which the present essay will not be concerned. The following pages will not address the various possible aesthetics of reception of these narratives: their insertion in social and temporal instances of pietistic practice and belief, in preachers’ art, their relative weight and location in the imaginary life of various times, places, and socio-cultural locations, their relation to non-canonical materials. Nor is there an attempt to study the related issue of the metaphorical use of Paradise to articulate mundane matters: Sufi-inspired notions, for instance, have the four first caliphs (Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Ali) pre-existing in Paradise as lights coeval with the Muhammadan light;¹⁸ misogyny and asceticist piety have the population of Hell predominantly

composed of women and of the rich; eighty of the 120 throngs of the Elect houses in Paradise are Muslims; the extent of indulgence in any pleasure in the afterlife is inversely proportional to the extent of indulgence in this world.¹⁹ But these matters are outside the remit of this study, as are the ironical and irreverent pronouncements on the descriptions of Paradise as, for instance, those of Ibn al-Riwandī (d. ca. 860), who likened the pleasures described within it to what might be sought by uncouth peasants and Kurdish tribeswomen; so also are the moralistic strictures inspired by philosophical ethics such as the view held by Miskawayh (d. 1030), that the sensual view of Paradise is one held by ignorant degenerates and uncouth commoners, and can lead only to the debasement of this-worldly motivation.²⁰ Nor is there any consequential attempt to offer a study of the literary genres in which paradisiacal narratives are inserted. I have not done a structural study of these narratives as myths, nor have I analyzed them in terms of psychoanalytical categories, which would necessarily call up considerations from all the possible modes of studying this material that I have indicated; nor again have I attempted a motifemic analysis or cross-cultural comparison. The reader will not find facile explanations linking those imaginings to the blunted desires of impotent men living in desert surroundings, neither is there any attempt to use the material to discuss the constructions of gender. What this study will offer, however, is indications concerning the morphology of the sensual elements in these narratives which might be utilized for further, historical, anthropological, mythological or psychoanalytic studies. The vexed question of provenance and history of these narratives is entirely excluded from consideration, as is that of their subsequent history in late medieval Latin and early European vernacular literatures.

As befits God's very own cabinet of curiosities, Paradise is a realm of accentuation, and the discourse upon it a logothesis of rhetorical figures whose very improbability appears to be the measure of their desirability and, indeed, of their very inevitability. One prophetic tradition states that, just as Hell is all the more hellish for being surrounded by desires and pleasures, so Paradise is surrounded by unpleasantness.²¹ Many traditions describe the awareness of the Blessed of the fate of the Damned, and one articulates pleasure and pain and accentuates both by stating that the delightful *huris* enjoyed by the Blessed are in fact the wives of men who dwell in Hell,²² although other traditions describe the Blessed as being in total oblivion to all but the pleasures to which they attend constantly²³—each group of traditions is of use in particular discursive contexts. But all in all, Paradise is the realm of

pleasure so accentuated as to be perpetual and consummate—so much so, indeed, that it is said that the Blessed do not sleep, for fear slumber may divert them from their pleasurable occupations.²⁴ Desires in this realm of perpetual consummation are only virtual, as they are eradicated with such an immediacy and perpetuity of fulfillment as is the very stuff of Paradise. A hyperbolic rhetoric of pleasure, articulated in figures and classes of pleasurable acts and pleasurable objects, constitute a discourse closed by its very narration in the figures and *topoi* whose sentences are the sole reality of these sentences.

The juxtaposition in the Koranic text of the delights of Paradise and the torments of Hell are constant.²⁵ The same can be said for other relevant texts. In all respects, the discourses on Heaven and on Hell are isomorphous and complementary within their broader, discursive and other instances. Like all discourse on Paradise, descriptions of Hell are a labour of accentuation, of rendering impeccable and consummate, for, just as the pleasures of Paradise are impeccable and ever consummate, so are the torments to be met with in the dark catacombs of Hell, which signal the consummateness of their opposite: if one drop of *zaqqūm*, a juice extracted from a hellish tree on which the Damned feed, were to pollute the oceans, it would entirely spoil earthlings' livelihood, and if one single spark from the Fire of Hell were to reach the East, its heat would be felt in the West, and if a mountain were to be struck by a club with which the Damned are beaten, this mountain would be sure to disintegrate.²⁶ A Sisyphian mountain is located in Hell, which the Damned are forced to climb; it is a mountain made of fire so intense, that whenever the climber's hand is placed on it, it melts, and grows again instantly once it is withdrawn, and so that whenever the climber's foot is placed on it, this also melts, to be instantly replaced once it is withdrawn.²⁷

Thus it is clear that the discourse on Heaven (like that of Hell) is structured by two principles which constitute its elements: pleasure which is never inconsummate and always fulfilled, and the expression of this pleasure in terms of scale—the counterparts of this in Hell are of course the perpetuity and intensity of torment. It is noteworthy that this is out of keeping with the normal discourse on the exoticist fantastic in medieval Arab-Islamic culture. For there, the fantastic is expressed not in terms of distortion of size, but of grotesque hybridization and permutation of parts or by morphological distortion.²⁸ But it is comparable to two types of Arab fantastic narrative, which share some of its fantastic realism whereby fantasy is engendered by distortions of scale: eschatological narratives, especially of the Gog and

Magog, and the fantastic sumptuousness of the *Thousand and One Nights* and of anecdotal and pseudo-historical repertoire, especially those concerning the remote past; both also involve hybridization and the grotesque. Overall the material is narrative, with its veracity and realism strongly implied by its discursive context. But the mechanisms of realizing imaginary possibilities are distinct.

Be that as it may, the imaginative desire of the Blessed is limitless. Whatever one wishes is instantly materialized, so that desire is always matched by its consummation and is never merely desire.²⁹ The limitlessness of fulfillment is also implicated in the fairly rare Tradition that the Blessed can, at a particular place in Paradise, be metamorphosed into the identical copy of whoever they might wish to resemble.³⁰ On entry into Paradise, the Blessed are asked if they would be content with having what earthly kings had, and when they answer in the affirmative, they are given ten times as much,³¹ and even the lowliest among their number possesses 80,000 servants, 72 consorts, and a pavilion made of pearls and rubies whose size is as the distance between San'ā in Yemen and Southern Syria,³² although it is sometimes said that this pavilion is merely a cavernous giant pearl measuring one parsang by one parsang, with 4000 golden doors, or, in other traditions, measuring three nights march across.³³

It is unsurprising that the soil of Paradise should be of musk, that its breeze should be scented with musk, that its rivers are of pure water, milk, honey, and wine, that its dimensions should be so vast. The sense of space is also conveyed by the trees that exist therein, each of which shades areas 100 years' march across and which, once a fruit is picked off them, immediately give birth to another³⁴—not only is desire immediately arrested by fulfillment, but visual want and the potential for privation are instantly remedied by the restoration of impeccability, of consummateness, of the integral *spectacle* which might again call up desire. This expansion of spatial dimensions and the instant remedialism of paradisiacal physiology is matched by the contraction of temporal dimensions, conveying a sense of constant immediacy, of a timeless because effortless eternity, an eternity reduced to the dimension of an instant. Thus the same vast trees mentioned, whose fragrance can be smelt up to 1000 years' journey away, can nevertheless be crossed in the flash of an eyelid if one were seated on the *Rafrāf*, the winged horse made of red rubies which, along with a white camel, are, apart from birds, the only animals in Paradise.³⁵ And when a man from among the Blessed reclines in repose, he does so for seventy years at a stretch,³⁶ a span of time which indicates the immediate timelessness conveyed by

repose. As for the plenty of clothing—all silk—the same garment worn by one of the blessed constantly changes color, indeed, it changes color seventy times every while (*sā'a*).³⁷

Paradise is thus a grand utopian spectacle in which impeccability is articulated in terms of scale. It is in keeping with this fundamental nature of things paradisiacal that every man in Paradise be optimally conceived: he will have the height of Adam (60 cubits), the age of Jesus (33 years), the beauty of Joseph, and he will speak Muhammad's language,³⁸ for each of these descriptions is in itself consummate: Adam is the consummation of innocent original humanity recapitulated in Paradise, the age of Jesus is that of consummate yet still vigorous manhood, Joseph was proverbially beautiful and the Arabic language is that of the Koran which rounds off human existence and consummates it, and clearly also, of Paradise and of God Himself. The spectacular impeccability of the heavenly throngs is further emphasized by the absence of ordures, for the Blessed do not blow their noses, nor do they urinate or defecate and are indeed said not to have recta, and the women do not menstruate. In the rare event of spitting, such spittle is so sweet as to sweeten the sea, and any bodily waste is released by the skin in the form of a musk-like scent—the bodies of the Blessed, after all, are perfected and eternal, and what they consume is consumed for pleasure only, not for sustenance, and the sumptuousness of provisions is again for pleasure and entirely unrelated to need.³⁹

A not unnatural implication of this is that, the copious intensity of sexual activity notwithstanding, no semen is produced by either man or woman—medieval physiology believed both sexes produced their respective type of semen, both required for conception. Sexual union is conducted as a continuous movement of shoving (*dahman dahman*), uninterrupted by orgasm,⁴⁰ therefore unspoiled and potentially a perpetual act. The sexual capacity of every man in Paradise is the equal to that of one hundred men of the world, capable of deflowering and copulating with one hundred virgins every day,⁴¹ an optimal potency which is a consummate maximum like the impeccable expression in terms of prophets that was encountered above—indeed; Solomon was credited with the libido of one hundred men while Muhammad, manifestly well provided, only had that of thirty to forty men.⁴²

The absence of orgasm in Paradise is arresting. It indicates certainly more than the sublimation of an impotent or geriatric lewdness. For one thing, it conforms to one fundamental narrative disposition which requires a sense of the perpetuity of pleasure, and it is interesting that the finality of climax was not thus conceived *sub specie aeternitatis*,

but was rather subsumed in the moment of perpetual potency, of endless capacity, of the total and unbending empowerment expressed in the endless freneticism of the expression *dahman dahman*, thus underlining the rhetoric of spectacle according to which Paradise is constructed. Moreover, it conflates beginnings with ends, climax with coitus, and thus eradicates desire as desire by rendering the fulfillment of desire coeval with desire itself and by freezing activity in a moment—eternity where desire as longing and inconsummate wish, that is, as privation, is eradicated and transformed into desire as a mere figure of utter fulfillment: in this, desire in Paradise ceases to be desire, and is transformed into wish, into the imagination of desire instantly eradicated, and frozen into the image of fulfillment which is the paradisiacal reality of a desire which is only virtual. Thus, just as space is inconsequential and is the mere indication of spatial sumptuousity, and just as time is nonexistent, as it never intervenes between beginnings and ends but only passes in a space shorter than the flash of an eyelid, so is coital activity frozen in an eternal moment of potency, in the form of a spectacle.

In other words, sexual pleasure—or rather, genital possession—is a *visual* prospectus for pleasure delightful to desire, not an act involving desire or pleasure; and just as the physical description of Paradise is a prospectus for boundless sumptuousity which, upon scrutiny, will reveal itself to be in part a situation of extreme discomfort and coldness—hard surfaces of precious stones—so genital congress with the famous *huris* (*al-hūr al-‘īn*—those with large jet black eyes) will reveal itself as pleasing to the imagination only if the various single components of these acts are each considered on their own as instances of sumptuousity magnified, and if the appearance of these *huris* is itself disassociated into the component parts of which the *huris* are composed. The rhetoric of paradisiacal pleasure, like the rhetoric of canonical feminine beauty, is the congress and concatenation of single pleasurable parts. More on this later.

Of paradisiacal consorts, it is a matter of general Consensus (*ijmā‘*), (with variations irrelevant for the purposes of this study) that every man in Paradise will have two wives—women who had lived and died, normally the man’s earthly wives—in addition to seventy *huris*.⁴³ Additional pleasure is derived from the enjoyment of boys,⁴⁴ although some exegetes do not seem to imply any carnality in this enjoyment but rather convey a sense of these boys figuring as assiduous servants, like the Ganymedes, cupbearers to the Olympians, while others explicitly denied the existence of paederasty in Paradise, which induced the

infamous but celebrated bisexual libertine poet Abū Nuwās (d. 813–5) to urge his friends to stock up in this world on what they will miss in the next.⁴⁵

The sense of spectacular unreality is sustained by the character of the sexual relations that exist in Paradise and by this very description of the *huris*' consummate and fully describable beauty. They are recursively virginal, in keeping with the spectacular consummateness of paradisiacal physiology, their virginity restored after every defloration by their man who, by all accounts, has a perpetual—and consequently an infinite—erection.⁴⁶ All the while, the *huris* pronounce a song announcing their fidelity to their men, their reliability, their constant acquiescence, all of which qualities being, like all else in Paradise, eternally complete and consummate, and an inversion of the character of worldly women.⁴⁷ One interpretation of a Koranic verse referring to boys in Paradise describes them as true and fast in their attachment, in clear contrast to the rent-boys of Baghdad, notorious for their fickleness, rapacity, and inconstancy.⁴⁸

Sexual union thus has the quality of spectacle, of a prospectus for perfection, utterly unencumbered, fully consummate. The reduction of the experience of women to the visible and the tactile to the exclusion of other senses well serves their objectification within the realm of the spectacular imaginary, and it is precisely this sort of objectification which renders irrelevant Traditions and pietistic writings—relevant to this world—enjoining mutuality in sexual pleasure.⁴⁹

Pleasure derived from the *huris* is spectacular, something to be beheld and described, to be enjoyed as the consummate act of the possession upon the object of this possession. Being a spectacle, one in which desire is only *virtual* by virtue of instant gratification, pleasure is taken perpetually and uniformly, for all the men in Paradise, like the *huris*, are of a uniform aspect and power. Hence the almost mathematical and abstract pleasure derived from the idea of pleasure, expressed uniformly and consummately, as one can see in the clinical detachment involved in pornographic discourse describing, for instance, defloration, or a series of sixteen positions of heterosexual intercourse, each ending with a metonymical title derived from the aural effect caused by, or from another characteristic of, that position.⁵⁰ It also bears comparison with the clinical detachment in evidence in the works of Sade—and is therefore Sadean albeit not sadistic—where the actor is also the punctilious spectator, where the act and the conception of the act are one, where the gaze and the technique are coterminous. In addition to this, in the case of paradisiacal pleasure, it cannot be overstressed that sexu-

al pleasure is entirely and exclusively genital, complementary to the infinite erections of the Blessed.

This perpetual cathexis is performed upon objects whose very description necessitates their fragmentation into parts which convey the spectacle of sumptuousity and consummate beauty, but which, when entire, do not meet any aesthetic specifications of which the present author is aware. This virtual beauty is consonant with the virtual pleasure of genital congress with them. The beauty of the huris is accounted for by their eyes, and by the shape of their breasts (*kawā'ib*), which are the small breasts of pubescent girls in early adolescence, and which conform to the charms of 'A'isha which the Prophet so admired.⁵¹ In this, the appearance of the huris answers to a bookish medieval Arab-Islamic canon of feminine beauty,⁵² which is correlative with the spectacular quality required by discourse on Paradist. This canon of beauty, it must be stressed, is one based on the separate descriptions of individual bodily parts, the optimally beautiful ones which, if combined, convey strangely grotesque and improbable shapes, such as the breasts indicated conjoined to a very narrow waist and unnaturally large buttocks. Such is the manner in which a rhetoric of beauty is construed.

The discourse on the idea of paradisiacal pleasure devolves here again to one on the idea of the spectacular sumptuousity of the object, and constructs its rhetoric accordingly. For the huris' complexion is so soft and fair that their skin, as thin and delicate as the membrane separating an egg from its shell,⁵³ is simultaneously reflective (because white) and translucent (because soft): a man sees his own face reflected in her skin, despite the seventy garments of exquisite finesse that she wears,⁵⁴ and his sight can also penetrate her infinitely delicate skin and flesh to see the marrow inside her bones, as one sees red drink in a white glass.⁵⁵ Other traditions describe the huris as composite creatures: they are made of musk between their feet and knees, of amber between their knees and breasts, and of camphor upwards of their chests.⁵⁶

Objects to behold in every discrete detail, enticements that engage the desire for enjoyment and the idea of an infinity of pleasure, the huris yet do not conclude nor foreclose the possibilities of even more sublime pleasure. And this further sublimity is also a spectacle, that of the vision of God's Face which, it has been rightly pointed out, is in continuity with the sexual pleasures of Paradise in which the sexual and the sacral are integrated.⁵⁷ The agency of this integration, the continuum along which both are ranged, and the sign under which it is performed, is the spectacle and the sense of pleasure, of bliss, that it

conveys. The involvement of the Scriptures in this is a purely aesthetic one, where the Text is fully aestheticized and sensualized, and converted to pleasure, as we shall see. Scripture is no longer a guide to belief and action: this function, purely mundane, is superseded by its becoming an object of sheer enjoyment.

It seems immaterial precisely how the Face of God is seen, how much of it is seen, in what form, or whether it be pure light,⁵⁸ all of which are matters deeply implicated in theological disputes over anthropomorphism and allegorism. These matters do not seem to have had a consequential impact on the aesthetic of this vision, on its inevitability, or the circulation of images concerning the relevant literature, much of which, by all indications, is somewhat later than the crystallization of *hadith* narratives on Paradise. It is equally immaterial whether women in Paradise do in fact behold Him,⁵⁹ though the predominant strand of opinion seems to have been that they do. What is germane to the spectacle and to the desired experience of Paradise is that beholding the divine Face is the most pleasurable of all paradisiacal delights.⁶⁰ In all events, the Beatific Vision is said to occur at regular intervals, specified by particular days in some traditions and allocated to particular times of the day in others, and, in all cases, following a rhythm roughly equivalent to the mundane rhythm of prayer rituals. Other traditions suppose Him to be beholden as is the moon, by men in repose, reclining on their couches.⁶¹

These periodic encounters are nowhere described as to their proceedings. But an idea of what might be involved could be gained from the descriptions that abound of the spectacular reception God throws for the Blessed upon their arrival in Paradise. For the sumptuousity of this spectacle—presided over by God, who is also the main actor in this spectacle and the climax of the “sublime symphony”⁶² performed—reclaims all the elements that have been discussed in this study, with the exception of the genital, for the pleasure deriving from the Beatific Vision far exceeds pleasure derived from intercourse.

The reception⁶³ is preceded by a procession of the Blessed, led by Adam, Muhammad, and the other prophets. In the flash of an eyelid, they all traverse the span of a silver palace the length of 1000 years’ march, then that of a golden palace of the same dimensions. Also in the flash of an eyelid, the procession traverses the 3000-year span of a palace made of green emerald and a 4000-year palace of red ruby. Just as instantly, the throngs traverse a fifth palace, 5000 years long and made of sapphire, and a sixth, 6000 years long and made of chrysolite, and four further palaces of various precious stones and up to 10,000

years long. After all these distances have been covered, the procession glimpses, at a distance of 10,000 years, the light of the divine enclave which, when reached, proves to be a green meadow measuring 1000 years by 1000 years, with innumerable palaces each with the name of one of the Blessed inscribed on its door.

They then proceed to an even larger meadow, with two rows of trees, each tree bearing 70,000 palaces; within each palace are 70,000 couches of gold, each 300 yards long. Should any of the Faithful wish to recline on one of these couches, it contracts to his size and then returns to its original size once he has installed himself upon it. A most sumptuous banquet then proceeds, with exquisite foods served by the angels out of containers made of gold and gems, followed by the perfuming of the Faithful with musk and amber sprayed by the fluttering wings of birds dipped in perfume.

All the while, God is occluded by curtains of pearls and curtains of light,⁶⁴ but these are removed once the banquet is over. And God states:⁶⁵

Welcome O my worshippers and guests. Angels: delight my worshippers with music. The Angels then proceed to fetch the musicians of Paradise, they being the huris and flutes. The flutes are attached to branches of trees, each branch carrying 70,000 flutes. A breeze blows from below the divine Throne and enters the flutes and makes them sound tunes the better of which were never heard. God then tells the huris: enrapture my worshippers,

which they do with sweet songs. When the Faithful then tell God how much they enjoyed hearing his words (this being the Koran), He orders one of the angels to set up a platform made of as many steps as there are prophets, who are then seated according to their station with Muhammad occupying the most elevated position. The rest of the throngs present then sit on dunes of musk and amber, and then

the caller calls: O Abraham, rise and speak to your nation. God's Intimate then rises to his feet and reads the Tablets revealed to him to their end, and then sits down. Then follows the call from the most elevated heights to Moses, who says: Yes O Lord! and rises to his feet, and reads the Torah from beginning to end, then sits down, whereupon the call arrives from God the Elevated to Jesus, saying: rise and speak to thy people, whereupon he rises and reads the Gospel to its very end, and sits. Whereupon the call from God comes: O David! David says: Yes O Lord! God then says: ascend the platform and let my loved ones hear from

thee ten portions of the Book of Psalms. David thereupon rises to his feet and reads the Psalms in ninety different voices, and those assembled are greatly enraptured by David's voice, which causes them to cry for joy... Once they have recovered from their rapture God Almighty asks them: have you ever heard a sweeter voice than this? and they say: no, O Lord, never has a voice so sweet reached our ears. Whereupon the call from God Almighty comes, saying: my beloved Muhammad, ascend the platform and recite [the Koranic chapters of] *Tāha* and *Yāsīn*. Muhammad therefore ascends the platform and recites then, and exceeds David's voice in beauty by seventy times. The people there assembled are entranced, as are the seats upon which they sit, and the lantern of the Throne, and the Angels likewise undulate with rapture, and likewise the huris and the boys. Nothing possessing a soul remains unmoved by the voice of the Prophet, may God's praise be upon him. Then God says: have you heard the recitations of my prophets? and they say: Yes O Lord our God. He says to them: do you wish to hear the recitation of your Lord? and they say with one voice: we desire nothing but this. Ibn 'Abbās [the traditionist] narrated: then the Lord most elevated recites [the Koranic chapter] of *al-Rahmān*, and, in another text, *al-An'ām*, and upon hearing the recitation of the Truth, the most elevated, they all faint with rapture, and entranced are the Angels and the Veils and the palace and the trees, and the leaves flutter and clap, and the birds chirp and sing, and the rivers undulate with the pleasure of the recitation by the most Precious, the most Powerful, and the Throne ripples with pleasure, and the divine Chair bends with wonderment, and nothing in Paradise remains without trembling with longing for God Almighty.

The scene continues in what seems to be a fairly late addition to the repertoire:

it is also narrated that the people of Paradise wish neither to eat nor to drink unless they hear the recitation of the Lord the most elevated, but to enjoy its sweetness and beauty. When they awaken from their rapture, the Lord the most elevated says to them: my worshippers, have you any other wishes? and they say: Yes; It remains for us to see your gracious Face. The Lord the most elevated then says: O Cherub, lift the veil between me and my worshippers. The angel then lifts the veil and a wind blows unto them that causes their clothes to shine, that beautifies their face and clears their hearts and pleases their bodies... The Lord the most elevated then says to the Cherub: Lift the

greatest veil between me and my worshippers. And when this is lifted off His Face he calls: who am I? and they say: you are God. God says: I am peace, you are the peaceful, I am the believer, you are the believers, I am the beloved and you the beloved; this is my Speech: hear it, and this is my Light: behold it, and this is my Face: view it. So they look at the Face of the Truth the most elevated, with no intermediary and no veils, and when the lights of Truth shine upon their faces, their faces are illuminated, and they remain looking at the Face of Truth for three hundred years.

The rise of this sublime spectacle to its crescendo mirrors, of course, world hierarchies. But the most salient feature for this essay is not this matter, but rather that it is an ascent towards the most sublime of delights, indeed, to the limit of all possibilities which, apart from the pleasure taken from this spectacle, are limitless, and it is to this limitlessness of visual pleasure that the majority of the Blessed revert, for, as al-Ghazālī stated:

He whose love for God in the world was driven by the wish for the delights of Paradise and the huris and palaces, is admitted to heaven to fulfil what he desires, playing with boys and enjoying women, for such are the bounds of his pleasure in the afterlife ... whereas he whose only aim is the God of the Ka'ba and the All-Possessing, and who was overcome only by his love ... is placed upon a seat of truth by a capable King. The Faithful thus enjoy orchards and delights in gardens with the huris and the boys. Whereas those closer to God are ever present in His Presence, ever gazing at His Presence, holding in contempt the bliss of the gardens ... This is why the Apostle of God, may God's praise be upon him, said: The majority of dwellers in Paradise are simpletons (*al-buluḥ*).⁶⁶

Notes

- ¹ Jacques Le Goff, "The Repudiation of Pleasure," in idem, *The Medieval Imagination*, tr. A. Goldhammer, Chicago, and London, 1988, pp. 93–103.
- ² Al-Tijānī, *Tuhfat al-'arūs wa mut'at al-nufūs* [The Bride's Treasure and the Spirit's Pleasure], ed. J. 'Atiyya, London, 1992, pp. 24, 29, 51, and *passim*.
- ³ The reader might wish to refer to the detailed medical accounts in the relevant section of Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, ed. D. E. Immisch, Oxford, 1992.
- ⁴ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawdat al-muhibbīn wa nuzhat al-mushtāqīn* [The Garden of Lovers and the Promenade of Those with Longing], rev. S. Yūsuf, Beirut, 1982, pp. 118, 173.
- ⁵ Tijānī, *Tuhfa*, pp. 23–4.
- ⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mahabba wa'l-uns wa'l-shawq wa'r-ridā* [Love and Conviviality and Longing and Satisfaction], Cairo, 1961, p. 52; and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawda*, pp. 18–20, 132–3.
- ⁷ Muhammad Rashid Ridā, *Fatāwī*, ed. Yūsuf Khūrī and Salāh al-Din al-Munajjid, Beirut, 1970–1, nos. 193, 196.
- ⁸ Tāhir Labīb, *Sūsyūlūjiyā al-ghazal al-'arabī* [The Sociology of Arab Love Poetry], tr. M. Misnāwī, Beirut and Casablanca, 1987, p. 19.
- ⁹ Salāh al-Din al-Munajjid, *Al-Hayāt al-jinsiyya 'ind al-'Arab* [Sexual Life among the Arabs], 2nd ed., Beirut, 1975, p. 142. See also, Tijānī, *Tuhfa*, chs. 20 and 21; Al-Nafzāwī, *Al-Rawd al-'ātir fī nuzhat al-Khātīr* [The Fragrant Garden], ed. J. Jum'a, London, 1990, chs. 7 and 8; Ibn Kamāl Pasha, *Rujū' al-Shaykh ilā Sibāh* [Return of the Old Man to his Youth], n.p., n.d. [Beirut, ca. 1934], pt. 2, ch 17.
- ¹⁰ Text in Ihsān 'Abbās, *'Abd al-Hamīd b. Yahyā al-Kātib*, Beirut, 1988, p. 197. I thank Dr. R. El-Enany for bringing this text to my attention.
- ¹¹ For instance, E. Berthels, "Die paradiesischen Jungfrauen" (Hūrīs) im Islam," *Islamica* 1 (1925), pp. 263–87.
- ¹² Soubhi El-Saleh, *La vie future selon le Coran*, Paris, 1971, p. 25.
- ¹³ Ibid, pp. 73–4.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, part 3; and Berthels "Die paradiesischen Jungfrauen," pp. 268 ff.
- ¹⁵ The fullest sketch of Paradise and Hell in Muslim tradition in a Western language is that of El-Saleh already quoted. See also Yvonne Yazbek Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Albany, 1981.
- ¹⁶ Northrop Frye, "Varieties of Literary Utopia," in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. F. E. Manuel, Cambridge, Mass. and Boston, 1966, p. 25.
- ¹⁷ Roland Barthes, *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*, tr. R. Miller, New York, 1976, p. 133.
- ¹⁸ Al-Suyūti, *Al-Durar al-hisān fī'l-ba'th wa na'im al-jinān* [The Comely Jewels on the Resurrection and the Bliss of Paradise], Cairo, A.H. 1312, p. 1.
- ¹⁹ For instance, Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 1, Cairo, A.H. 1313, p. 359; al-Suyūti, *Durar*, p. 25; al-Ghazālī, *Mahabba*, p. 47.
- ²⁰ Text in 'Abd al-Amīr al-A'sam (ed.), *Tārīkh Ibn al-Rīwandī al-Mulhid* [History of Ibn al-Rīwandī the Atheist], Beirut, 1975, p. 163; Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* [The Refinement of Character], ed. Qustantin Zuraïq, Beirut, 1966, pp. 2–3.

- ²¹ Muslim, *Al-Jāmi' al-Sahih* [The True Collection], vol. 8, Cairo, A.H. 1383, pp. 142–3.
- ²² Ibn Māja, *Sunan* [Traditions], ed. Muhammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, Cairo, n.d., no. 4337.
- ²³ Al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān* [Koranic Exegesis], vol. 23, Būlāq, A.H. 1328–9, p. 13.
- ²⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāyat al-bidāya wa'n-nihāya fi'l-fitan wa'l-malāhim* [The End of the Beginning and the End], vol. 2, ed. Muhammad Abū 'Ubayya, Riyadh, 1968, p. 296.
- ²⁵ Cf. El-Saleh, *La vie future*, pp. 7–8.
- ²⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 2, pp. 129, 145, 152.
- ²⁷ Ibid, p. 158.
- ²⁸ See Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Al-'Arab wa'l-Barābira* [Arabs and Barbarians], London, 1991, pp. 197 ff.
- ²⁹ Muslim, *Sahih*, vol. 1, p. 114.
- ³⁰ Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan* [Traditions], ed. Ibrāhīm 'Awad, Cairo, A.H. 1382, no. 2550.
- ³¹ Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 27, p. 66.
- ³² Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, no. 2562.
- ³³ Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 27, p. 94.
- ³⁴ For instance, Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 2, p. 13, vol. 3, p. 207; and Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 2, p. 263.
- ³⁵ El-Saleh, *La vie futur*, pp. 35–7.
- ³⁶ Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 26, p. 110.
- ³⁷ Al-San'ānī, *Al-Musannaf* [The Book of Traditions], ed. Habīb al-A'zamī, Beirut, 1983, no. 20868.
- ³⁸ For instance, ibid, no. 20872; and Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 2, p. 343. Cf. Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, no. 2545.
- ³⁹ For instance, Suyūṭī, *Durar*, pp. 20, 22; and see Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* [The Greater Exegesis], Cairo, n.d., vol. 26, p. 137, vol. 29, p. 165.
- ⁴⁰ San'ānī, *Musannaf*, no. 20890; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawda*, p. 203.
- ⁴¹ Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 29, p. 137; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawda*, pp. 202–3.
- ⁴² Tijānī, *Tuhfa*, pp. 357, 354–6.
- ⁴³ For instance, Muslim, *Sahih*, vol. 1, p. 120; and Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 2, pp. 258–9.
- ⁴⁴ For instance, Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 29, p. 136; and Tifāshī, *Nuzhat al-albāb fi-mā lā yūjad fi kitāb* [Promenade of Friends among what is not Contained in Books], ed. J. Jum'a, London, 1992, p. 174.
- ⁴⁵ Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 29, pp. 149–50; Tifāshī, *Nuzha*, p. 175; and see the comments of Muhammad Jalāl Kishk, *Khawātir Muslim fi 'l-mas'ala al-jinsiyya* [Reflections of a Muslim on the Sexual Question], 3rd ed., Cairo, 1992, pp. 202, 206–7.
- ⁴⁶ For instance, Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 23, p. 13 and vol. 27, p. 94; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawda*, pp. 197–8, 202.
- ⁴⁷ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawda*, pp. 195–6, 200, 202; Suyūṭī, p. 20; Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 23, p. 36.
- ⁴⁸ The reference is to “wuldān mukalladūn” in Al-Wāqī'a, 17, on which see Māwardī, *Al-Nukat wa'l-'Uyūn: Tafsīr al-Māwardī* [Koranic Exegesis], ed.

- Khidr M. Khidr, Kuwait, 1982, *ad. loc.* On Baghdadian and other rent-boys, see Tifāshī, *Nuzha*, pp. 138 ff.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. the statement of Ghazālī, *Mahabba*, p. 9; and see for instance, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawda*, 175–7; Tijānī, *Tuhfa*, pp. 123–4.
- ⁵⁰ Tifāshī, *Nuzha*, pp. 282–3; Ibn Kamāl Pāshā, *Rujū' al-shaykh*, pp. 144–7.
- ⁵¹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawda*, p. 197, who misinterprets the word, on which see Tijānī, *Tuhfa*, p. 318. Huris are therefore certainly not “buxom,” as in Haddad and Smith, *Death and Resurrection*, p. 165.
- ⁵² See Tijānī, *Tuhfa*, pp. 318 ff.
- ⁵³ Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 23, p. 34.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., vol. 26, p. 110.
- ⁵⁵ San‘ānī, *Musannaf*, no. 20867.
- ⁵⁶ Al-Sha‘rānī, *Mukhtasar al-tadhkira al-Qurtubīyya* [Conspectus of Qurtubī’s Book], Cairo, n.d., p. 103.
- ⁵⁷ Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, tr. Alan Sheridan, London, 1985, pp. 80–1, 86. He entitles his chapter on Paradise “The Infinite Orgasm,” which is inappropriate.
- ⁵⁸ For instance, Ghazālī, *Mahabba*, pp. 40–1; Muslim, *Sahīh*, vol. 1, pp. 112–5; Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 29, p. 120.
- ⁵⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 2, p. 302.
- ⁶⁰ Muslim, *Sahīh*, vol. 1, p. 112.
- ⁶¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 2, pp. 301–2.
- ⁶² El-Saieh, *La vie future*, p. 62.
- ⁶³ The following account is based on the integrated narrative of Suyūṭī, *Durar*, 24 ff.
- ⁶⁴ Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 26, pp. 108–9.
- ⁶⁵ Suyūṭī, *Durar*, pp. 28–9.
- ⁶⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Mahabba*, pp. 81–2.

CHAPTER 7

Islamic Political Thought: Current Historiography and the Frame of History¹

“The landlord of the lodging, who had heard that they were a queer couple, had doubted that they were married at all, especially as he had seen Arabella kiss Jude one evening when she had taken a little cordial; and he was about to give them notice to quit, till by chance overhearing her one night haranguing Jude in rattling terms, and ultimately flinging a shoe at his head, he recognised the note of genuine wedlock; and concluding they must be respectable, said no more.”

Thomas Hardy

“Non sapete voi come il tanto legger la scrittura guasti la religione Cattolica?”

Pope Paul V

The historical interplay between religion and political functions and conceptions, and with history more generally, has been very much in vogue in recent years, with assertions that the world is being re-enchanted, or that it had never been as disenchanted as had previously been thought in the first place. Yet this new mood sweeping historical scholarship is still conceptually and historically somewhat uncertain in its bearings and conceptual moorings, despite notable exceptions.

It is thus perhaps little surprising that conceptions of power and political thought elaborated in the course of Muslim histories, in modern times no less than in the classical and medieval periods, are fields of study that have continued to attract attention in recent years in this field of scholarship, which had rarely entertained the idea of a world disenchanted. Yet these conceptions have not been generally well served by scholarship except within the rather narrow constraints of political history and of the dogmatic history of Muslim sects, and in so far as a small number of individual thinkers, such as Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) and al-Fārābī (d. 950), have been the objects of particular interest. Basic research and monographic studies in this field have generally been rather sparse and, partly as a consequence, systematic and synthetic studies—as opposed to summary statements—have been few

and far between. Such studies as are available have, moreover, generally been incomplete, often appearing to drift towards formulations and inflections that tend to reconfirm unreflected and untested general assumptions and presumptions held by the general public about the course of Islamic history.

It is therefore to be welcomed that two general and systematic studies in English, by Anthony Black and Patricia Crone, have appeared recently,² the field having been doubtlessly energized—to publishers and authors alike—by the international salience and spectacular appearance of Islamic fundamentalist movements in recent years. These publications provide the opportunity to consider and assess the state of the field in the study of the history of Islamic political conceptions, and to consider what progress might have been made since the appearance 35 ago of a book also intended as a teaching manual, by the veteran scholar William Montgomery Watt,³ and what avenues of research might be thereby opened or foreclosed.

Correlatively, the discussion to follow will attempt to clarify issues, attempt to set and reset research questions, when such do exist in the literature under discussion, and help to define or redefine the field of Islamic political thought, when such a definition is in fact proposed. It will describe, first of all, some generative historiographic parameters—narrative, conceptual, institutional, and public—that act as a grid for the study of Islamic political thought. These yield thematic elements that are regarded to be of central relevance, and exclude others, thereby orienting the perspectives adopted in the two books which are taken here as describing the state of the field. This is on the understanding that a field of research gains a specific consistency and coherence when set in general treatments and works meant as textbooks. This is by no means to deny that the field has not been otherwise approached; but general statements of the kind treated in this article betoken a different degree and manner of diffusion and accessibility.

The pages that follow will then go on to discuss substantive historical and conceptual themes that arise from the frames of reference discussed. It will doubtless be noted that, given the perspective adopted here of approaching the overall theme by studying the state of the field as expressed in the two books under discussion, the author is constrained by the structure and thematic content of these books, and that an alternative approach cannot be adequately articulated. The elements of such an approach will be proposed somewhat more systematically in the following chapter. Finally, the thematic and conceptual delimitation of an object of study which we might term “Islamic political thought,”

necessitating clear definitions of the field of the political and how such might be delimited as “Islamic,” and the kinds of sources that would be appropriate for its study, is a matter that will be taken up at a variety of points. This is an important matter. Civilizations preceding the civilization of modernity, including classical and medieval Arabic and Islamic civilization, did discourse on matters that in early modern and modern times came to be seen as those pertaining to political science and political thought. Yet the domains of politics and political thought as understood today were not absent, albeit conceived hitherto as belonging to other discursive genres, such as philosophy, political theology, law, history, mythology, and works of advice for princes, and it would not be legitimate to assume that a distinctive domain called “political thought” as it came to be constituted later already existed, anywhere, in classical or medieval times.

I. Historiographic schemata: Chronotopoi of singular origins, rise and decline

Substantial progress has doubtlessly been made in some respects since the publication of Watt’s book. It is clear that the range of themes treated by Black and Crone, and the historical and geographical parameters the authors adopt, enhance Watt’s slender empirical base very substantially. Crone’s is a work of substantial erudition and range. Her command of her material and the coherence of her arguments are far firmer than Black’s, whose chronological range is nevertheless longer, she stopping with the 13th century and he, with considerable learning, following up the matter until today.⁴

Unfortunately, it is equally clear that this enhancement is unmatched by progress of historiographic import. Crucial assumptions relative to periodization, to thematic divisions and conceptual configurations, and to topics identified as salient to Islamic political thought, remain largely the same, unresponsive to the enhanced empirical base. These derive seemingly from the once-standard tropes, habits and historiographic presumptions which constituted, until recently, inertial energy of the Islamic Studies institution in western universities, and from more demotic assumptions as well. Watt’s book consists of a sequence of brief and often simplistic stereotyped outlines of selected historical moments, organized by an implicit but substantive periodization according to a simple pattern of sudden rise and protracted decline. This is a narrative structure, an historiographic schema, familiar alike from textbooks and

popular treatments of and pronouncements on Muslim history, and is largely repeated, far more elaborately, in Crone's and Black's construals of the history of Islamic political thought.⁵

Both works postulate a pattern of Muslim history, and a correlative pattern of political thought, commencing with a beginning which is in effect, for all intents and purposes and despite the citation of this or that external influence, *ex nihilo* in structural terms, defining a history utterly apart and singular. This is then seen to lead to the uncommonly rapid elaboration of a religious culture which settles into patterns that are to last for centuries, and which prescribe the mainsprings of cultural production, including political thought. But this is chronologically correlated with a decline in historical energy, the entry of entropy into a structure fully energized at its beginning. In this perspective, Islamic political thought is constituted whole, coterminously with its moment of origin, and subsequent political thought devolves to devising ways of coping with political atrophy and with the incommensurability between original religio-political ideals henceforth sustained in the imagination, and the realities of political life. The *ex nihilo* character of this beginning, and the self-enclosed, *sui generis* character of the "culture" it produces, are reinforced, in this account, by the elision of the geographical dimension in historical analysis, and the conditions obtaining in the territories where Islamic political conceptions were conceived—the eastern territories of Late Antiquity—are obscured from view and over-determined by their Muslim-Arabian origin. Things happen not in territories with determinate characteristics and traditions, but "in Islam," here become an extra-territorial substitute for space, just as "beginnings" are a substitute for historical time. Consequently, one might characterize this historiography as proceeding not with the diachronic comparativism generally called periodization, but with the succession of chronotopoi—a succession perhaps most famously exemplified in the simple schema ancient-medieval-modern.

I. 1. Chronologies of singularity

Thus the first section of Crone's book, "The Beginnings" as a chronotopos of "origin," takes up two different registers. The first, the subject of the first chapter, sketches what the author takes to be the origins of government according to Islam, and purports to give the reader an appreciation of the generic uniqueness of Islamic political thought in terms of Islamic mythology discussed below. Then follow two chapters of a chronological nature, working out the historical realization

of doctrinal origins previously sketched, and treating the civil war of 656–7, attendant sect formation, and the Umayyad period—largely corresponding in terms of the general chronotopic schema to Watt’s period of foundation by Muhammad and his successors in Medina. This is followed by what would correspond to Watt’s period of imperial consolidation: This second section in Crone’s book is inevitably entitled “The Waning of Tribal Tradition, c. 700–900,” and is organized around the political views of various sects, denominations or movements: the Kharijites, the Mu`tazilites, the earlier Shi`ites of various hues, the Zaydis, the Imami Shi`ites, and the Traditionalists. All are seen to elaborate ideas of authority disengaged from the Caliphal, i.e. the imperial monarchical state, in continuity with their religious beginnings and in dissonance with the political life and the political conceptions it generated.

Crone’s third section takes up what is standardly regarded as an era of disenchantment and decline, treating the theme of “Coping with a Fragmented World,” in terms of political ideas arising from the Persian tradition, *Fürstenspiegel*, philosophical trends, Ismāil‘ism (rather a good chapter), and Sunnism. Melodramatic poignance apart, precisely what might be meant by “coping,” and why relative political fragmentation might have induced political thinkers, who clearly flourished under these conditions, to want to “cope” rather than to elucidate, adapt and change is unclear, except if one were to assume that “Muslims,” having lost their Prophetic order, and congenitally lacking in agency, felt unremittingly bereft and consequently spent the vast span of centuries in a state of intense introspection and of brooding upon the past. The fourth and final section of Crone’s book is systematic rather than historical, entitled “Government and Society,” which discusses the themes of the nature and functions of government, “visions of freedom,” the social order, Muslims and non-Muslims, and an epilogue entitled “Religion, Government, and Society Revisited.”

Black’s scope is vast, historically and thematically. He adopts broadly a chronology analogous to that of Crone and Watt, repeating in essence the chronotopic structure, the succession of topoi or “patterns,” of historical narrative that we have seen in Crone and Watt. Of the four parts that make up his book, the first takes up periods of foundation, consolidation and atrophy as an historical and conceptual unit. Entitled “The Messenger and the Law, c. 622–1000,” this part takes up Muhammad, the idea of monarchy under the Umayyads and the Abbasids, Muslim traditionalism, Shi`ism, “the restoration of Persia,” meaning ideas of hierarchy of alleged Persian origin, and finally, the political

ideas of Muslim philosophers. The reader does not perceive an attempt to sketch historical concatenations and causalities as much as one to sketch a number of consecutive or contemporary themes and topoi. The two subsequent parts are cast after Crone's image of "coping" with a somewhat different chronological scheme which does not, however, constitute a distinct historical pattern.

The second part, "Religion and state power: Sunni doctrine of the state, c. 1000–1200," takes up the classical juristic theory of the Caliphate, the political ideas of Nizām al-Mulk and of al-Ghazālī, *Fürstenspiegel*, philosophy in the Islamic west, and the politics of Sufism. The third part, "the Shari'a and the Sword, c. 1220–1500," takes up a number of political thinkers who worked under sultanic conditions consequent to the destruction of the Caliphate: Nasīr ad-Dīn Tūsī (d. 1274), Ibn Taimiyya (d. 1328), Barānī (d. after 1357), Ibn Khaldūn, and sundry other matters. The fourth part discusses political ideas under the gunpowder empires of the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Mughals, filling in an important gap in the generalist literature. The last part is, inevitably, entitled "Islam and the West" and proffers a problematic discussion of the twin themes of Islamic modernism and Islamic fundamentalism, designed to show them in essential continuity with supposed medieval prototypes.

That Black is neither an Arabist nor a Persianist, and that he is rather a scholar of medieval European political thought, is signally courageous and particularly welcome. This circumstance arouses in the reader the reasonable anticipation that the history of Islamic political thought might at last have attracted the attention of the mainstream in medieval studies and in the history of political thought, and that the history of Islamic political thought might at last have been conceptually naturalized, subjected to the standard methods and conceptual equipment of the historical sciences, beyond presumptions of exoticism, of Muslim exceptionalism, and of historical self-enclosure.

But on the whole, such anticipation is unfortunately thwarted. The crucial point here is that the books under examination as representing the state of the field are connected historiographically and structurally. Black, for all the range of his reading, seems at once uncritically to defer to once-common Islamic Studies institutional and to demotic clichés, and to bolster such deference with acute tonalities of incomprehending wonder when he encounters matters that are not so terribly strange and exotic about Islamic political thought, and that might, if properly considered, have yielded important comparative results. In all, the books under discussion constitute conceptually congruent vari-

ants on a number of common standard themes and historiographic orientations, with some technical differences and variations of emphasis. All share the assumption that Islamic political theory, and Islamic history more generally understood, is somehow essentially *sui generis*, that it derives from a definitively constituted, predominantly scriptural and to a smaller extent Arabian “core,” that it is fundamentally self-referential, and that it is *sans pareille* and therefore ultimately admits of no truly systematic or systemic comparisons with other histories of political thought. Commonalities are reduced to influences, survivals, vicarious concordances, not to affinities, generic conceptual unities, or historical continuities, acculturations, contrary to evidence.⁶ Black’s ingenuous expressions of surprise at finding in Islamic political thought ideas to be encountered in medieval Latin political thought arise from this.

Our authors present their over-patterned histories as books put before an equally over-patterned reader, explicitly called “the western reader.” This reader is offered details and specifications on themes and arguments that may often be unfamiliar, but hardly anything is offered that might appear counter-intuitive even to the average reader of newspapers or to the spectator of television programs. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that some distinguished modern scholarship in Arabic on the topics treated, some quoted below, has not been taken into account.

The target reader is enjoined, in different individual tonalities, to access a history which differs “completely” (Watt, p. 64) from that of Europe, including Byzantine and medieval western Europe. He or she is advised that Islam “comprises a distinct and self-contained cultural unit” with “a coherent ... tradition, separate from the West and with a logic of its own” (Black, p. 1), which nevertheless, and perhaps not too incongruously in a mood of political correctness, might elicit a benign regard for “the kinship of the different” (ibid.). Islam, though not a place, is put forward as “the paradigmatic alternative to Europe” (ibid., p. 3). It resulted from an event, Muhammad and his Koran, which marks “a decisive break in human thinking about politics and society” (ibid., p. 9), and which sets the scene for the formation of “a type of society” which is “generically different from Greek, Roman, or Euro-Christian civilization” (ibid., p. 12). The consequence is that “our” political language “equips us poorly” to understand it (ibid., p. 13).

More concretely, the difficulty “the western reader” would have in understanding political thought in medieval Islam arises partly from the entirely unquestioned presumption that the religion of Islam was “the main source” of the state (Crone, p. viii), as this strange historical

itinerary “began with the Qur’an” (Black, p. 10). Of course, if that were indeed the case, if Islamic history and the political thought it produced were indeed spawned by a book as Eve emerged from Adam’s rib, it would be truly peculiar and out of line with human history overall, and would confirm the claims to uniqueness propounded by Muslim religious traditions. It is proposed that the “fusion”—the term used implies indistinction, yielding vagueness and indeterminacy, and the rhetorical occasion for asserting everything and nothing—of religion and politics is not only complete, but also in its consummateness unique among complex societies, and that there were no precedents for this in the Near East prior to the advent of Islam (Crone, 14f.). This presumption of exceptionalism is a matter which will be addressed presently in broad perspective, and I must rest content here with further specifying the presumed title to singularity attributed to Islamic history.

This singularity is grounded in a basic assumption, what Crone (p. 396) calls the “perfect identity” of religion, state, and society.⁷ It is of course extremely difficult to envisage such a “perfect identity” in the course of any history. Moreover, Crone’s justifiable source-critical scepticism about what knowledge of this “beginning”—in Crone somewhat more extended and more complex than Black’s, but still nevertheless brief, and a germinal repository of the future—may admit of empirical reconstruction (p. 21) would itself vitiate the very possibility of making assertions about an initial condition retained as the main-spring of what followed. The Muslim community, or *umma*, is nevertheless seen as having been *ab initio* an “all-purpose community,” congregation and state rolled into one (Crone, pp. 13, 15), related to the actually existing imperial Arab-Muslim state, the substrate of its history, by disjunction.

In a way, this all-purpose community—this *ekklésia*—is more reminiscent of the self-conception of radical Protestant communities, and their modern Muslim fundamentalist ideological analogues, than of Late Antique and medieval Muslim empires, and the deliberate or unintended comparison between these two would clearly and immediately be vitiated by considerations of scale. Clearly, the late antique aspect would have been crucial to the historiography of Muslim political conceptions, as they took shape in the central territories of Late Antiquity. Yet the fairly standard presumption of such “perfect identity,”⁸ and the correlative procedure of mutually reading history from texts and other forms of ideological expression and discursive sublimation,⁹ and deriving the latter from political events, is a crucial component implicit in the historiographic approach of the books under dis-

cussion. The identification between text and event, their consubstantiality, makes it very difficult to specify the parameters of “political thought” as a specific topic of study distinct from other enunciations made in the course of addressing political events.

1. 2. Scripturalist assumptions

A comparison such as the one suggested between aspects of the Reformation—the comparison is implicit in the adoption of the Reformation’s concept of the scripture and its scripturalisation of religion, which spread into general historical culture and colored much of scholarship on Islam and since the nineteenth century, hence references to this below—and ostensibly Muslim conceptions of all-purpose community might have been interesting for the history of religions had it not been for the two important facts that render such an approach anachronistic, and this is the first general comment to be made on the historiography of Islamic political thought in general. For one thing, Calvin and other figures of the Reformation had a well-defined scripture, regardless of scriptural elements and Latin versions contested by different Christian denominations, not least when matters came to be settled for purposes of editing, printing and translating the Bible into European vernaculars. They also had well-established textual, Patristic and ecclesiastical traditions, elements of which they variously rejected or valorized. Early Muslims at the “beginning,” in contrast, had a fragmentary scripture to which no definitive tradition of practice or interpretation had yet crystallized as tradition. Yet to this uncertain beginning much of western and Muslim scholarship has ascribed a stupendous, logo-centric internal coherence and a sense of definitive accomplishment, buttressed by what is generally taken as an *ab initio* monocratic order of Levitical resonance called *sharī‘a*. This is perhaps unsurprising, as western scholarship on Islam, as traditionally conceived, seems by conceptual congruence and willful credulity generally to mirror the image projected of Muslim beginnings by neo-traditionalism, and latterly by fundamentalism. Ultimately, this monocratic reading of Islam and the Koran is modelled on a strand of nineteenth-century scholarship on Judaism in general and Rabbinism in particular, despite the fact that there is no Koranic equivalent for the legislative sweep of Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy, and that Muslim jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is in decided measure extra-Koranic and non-canonical, despite its haggadic form.

More important is an anachronism of broader sweep, which would

concern not only “the beginning,” but the entire course of Muslim history up to the nineteenth century, and Christian history to the Reformation. This has to do with the conception of the canonical text, and the techniques of reading and handling scriptural traditions, in the context of considering the common assumption that the Koran is not only the fount of Muslim political theory, but also an integral “blueprint for life.” Together with the Reformation, the antiquarian humanism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries produced a philological notion of text which allowed for scriptures to be regarded as definitive and unmediated repositories of sense, to be approached integrally with the slogan *ad fontes*, accessible to a person, not so much lay as initiated, eschewing all but *sola sancta scriptura*. Yet Late Antique and medieval, Muslim, or Christian veneration for scripture did not allow for the meaningfully Procrustean management of this ubiquitous slogan as would be required by what might broadly be termed fundamentalism. Like other seemingly simple principles, the *sola scriptura* slogan itself and the appeal *ad fontes* were in practice, and beyond an almost cultic bibliolatriy (the term is Lessing’s) highly polysemic and multivalent, textually and historically, reflecting the vast complexity of the Reformation itself.¹⁰

Pre-modern rhetorical and philological techniques of reading precluded treating texts as monological, with original senses to be definitively restituted in terms of historical investigation (though such an approach did in principle exist, but used with extreme inconsistency and to pragmatic and rhetorical purpose), subject to definitive adjudication and precluding difference. Texts, including scriptures, were determinedly regarded in practice as intertextual, densely woven through the unflinching prism of commentary and of tradition, replete with different possibilities of reading yielded by linguistic, semantic, and conceptual elements internal to different commentarial traditions which, like interpretive traditions overall, covered a vast range varying between the kerygmatic and that which assumes an inherent objectivity of sense,¹¹ usually seen as lexical, grammatical, syntactical and more generally proto-philological, but also as historical, as in the exegetical genre of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (“circumstances of Revelation,” *circumstantiae scribentis*), a genre of Koran interpretation which sought to interpret Koranic statements in light of the historical circumstances that gave rise to their revelation. The relationship between language and reality in medieval Arabic culture was a complex one, and medieval Muslim divines were expected to have acquired a grounding in the rhetorical and other techniques of interpretation.¹²

It is unsurprising in these circumstances that no medieval Muslim divine was driven to claim that the Koran, for all its exemplary force, is a total “blueprint for life”; this would have meant nothing to him. No medieval Muslim divine derived the state, political thought, or an entire blueprint for society from the canon—this was possible only for modern fundamentalism building upon modern historiographic possibilities. The Koran, in other words, was invoked, not “applied.” The derision of commentaries, glosses, summaries, exegeses, and similar textual procedures of *aggiornamento* is, in religious discourse, associated with the Reformation, and, in historical scholarship, with 19th century positivism, in which text-critical procedures sought original documents and ostensibly original meanings deposited therein.

What mattered to medieval Muslim divines was what a canonical text might yield for a variety of genres, purposes and contexts; the degree to which the text of the Koran (or of the *hadith*, for that matter) is “overcoded” or “undercoded” does not admit of a definitive answer, and is dependent on the social, discursive and cultural contexts of canonical deployment on the assumption of polyvalence.¹³ The crucial matter was not the simple announcement of some notion of *ad fontes*, ubiquitous in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, but the recognition that such an announcement would be either meaningless or inconsequential if unaccompanied by an hermeneutical or pragmatic program. In the case of the Koran, these contexts and purposes of the canon—and of its readings in a variety of settings—might be devotional, ritual, dogmatic, oracular, recitational, homiletic, incantatory, commentarial, exegetical, magical, apotropaic, fetishistic, linguistic, literary, rhetorical, ideological, legal, theological, pseudo-historical (legendary, mythological, and genealogical), salvation-historical, political, and ethical, and for the sumptuous display of precious manuscripts. Each of these posed and still pose specific problems of interpretation. Moreover, the Muslim canon also comprised prophetic Traditions, both canonized and uncanonized or “apocryphal,” related to the Koran in a variety of complex ways, including the possibility that such Traditions might override the Koranic text by means of the complex concept of *naskh*, usually rendered as “abrogation.” No effort at summary simplification is thinkable in this regard, or in regard to the relation between prophetic Traditions, the Koran and traditions of mundane consensus contained in legal manuals. Crone (p. 126) does make the point that prophetic Traditions were initially in the nature of holy relics, a matter which might have called up an interesting anthropological reconsideration of the bookish ponderousness anachronistically attributed to the medieval

Muslims. But unfortunately this and other tantalising insights are served up by her in a rather cavalier and inconsequential manner, with no impact on the structure and arguments of her book, or on the overall definition of the topic or on the scrutiny of the nature of the materials and sources used.

What mattered about the Muslim canon for medieval authors, then, was not a notion of semantic objectivity inherent in the canonical text and disembodied from textual transmission, recitation, commentary and use, a notion of semantic objectivity which was unavailable to Muslims before the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Hence, sceptical statements made by medieval Muslim divines about the veracity of traditional accounts relating to early Islam went uncontested. The literal veracity of prophetic Traditions, for instance, was subject to healthy scepticism, but it was thought unwise to mount cognitive challenges to matters that had become components of a Great Tradition and had acquired practical consequence, in jurisprudence for instance, which necessitated the practical suspension of scepticism.¹⁵ Such contestation would have been meaningless anyway, for what mattered was the pragmatics of reception. Hence also the probabilistic character of Sunni legal traditions and their conception of legal judgement, the contention that, contrary to the possibility and necessity of certainty in matters of dogma, legal judgements can only be probable, and liable to contestation.¹⁶ After all, the relation between a canonical fragment and its interpretations for legal purposes, barring the small number of unambiguous commands, was not conceived on the modern model of a set code, but rather as one in which the text contains what in technical terms is an index (*amāra*) allowing practical conclusions and judgements, but not a ground for cognitive certainty.¹⁷ And hence, finally, the fact that of the Koranic manuscripts still preserved (and printed), a great many are of sections only, rather than of the integral text, codices of which (in its variants) were of course available from an early period, but which was only definitively fixed, in two *ne varietur* recensions based on traditions of recitation rather than on a manuscript edition in the 1920s when first printed in the Arab world: it is well-known that medieval exegetes structured their commentaries according to the consecutive flow of the Koran, with no regard to the Book as a whole or to the pericopes of which it consists thematically and genre-specifically (with the very notable exception of al-Rāzī—d. 1209). Last but not least, it appears that the Koran is above all to be understood anthropologically rather than to give primacy to its textual integrality, as phatic communication intended to maintain but not to specify communion

between God and His creation, more as a reminder that God addressed Muhammad as He had addressed earlier Prophets than as a complete record of what He might have said.¹⁸ Without regard to the technical apparatus of medieval Muslim reading of the canon, without seeking the devil in the detail, little sense can be made, and only the most summary simplifications can be set forth.

This said, one might proceed further and state that there are three sources of canonical status attributed, in the books under scrutiny, to Islamic political thought: the Koran, prophetic actions and pronouncements (the *hadīth*), and historical experience. The Koran is indeed ubiquitously quoted by Muslim authors on matters political as on other matters, and thus topologically used like all other scriptures. Yet for all its maxims, some enjoining obedience to one's betters and others speaking for the equality of Muslims before the eyes of God, the Koran cannot reasonably be taken as having been a source of Muslim political thought. This is not only because the myriad Koranic citations put forward to support either authoritarian or egalitarian positions take on meanings beyond their letter once they are incorporated into discourses on politics that arise from elsewhere, but also because for them to be properly understood in terms of the Koran as a whole these are more usefully seen in their mutual disposition in particular texts and in relation to other enunciations in question, in the incidence and contexts of their deployment, the instances of their absence, their reception and interpretation, the communicative and symbolic value they are made to bear, with emphasis on how these phenomena in intellectual history change over time.

It is a seldom appreciated fact that political exegesis of the Koran, that is, reading the Koran as a whole for the purpose of constructing political theory, is a twentieth-century phenomenon associated with integralist Islamic fundamentalism, without precedent in the classical and medieval periods, just as the slogan ubiquitous today that Islam is at once "religion and state" is a product of the twentieth century. In classical and medieval Muslim traditions, the Koran was not the object of sustained political meditation; Koranic citations with their extraordinary standing and weight were interpreted to support very contradictory political views, and solicited them for authority and support. But these quotations did not in themselves constitute these positions. This is of course also the case with all solicitation of and appeal to the biblical scripture in other monotheistic religions in pre-modern times.¹⁹

The same would apply to the second component of the Muslim canon, the *hadīth*, the corpus of narratives relating acts and pronouncements

of Muhammad, which range from the prophetic and credal through to the sententious and on to prescriptive statements and exemplary actions on matters of very specific detail. It cannot be said, apart from matters of ritual and cult, and a slight body of matters relating to certain aspects of practice (marriage, divorce, booty), that the Muslim canon provided the foundations of Muslim political thought except indirectly, as a quarry for quotations, often of vague import, that sustained positions arising from the conceptions and practices of Muslim kingship and political thought associated with it and spawned by it, and in large measure persisting in continuity with Late Antique notions of kingship and ecumenical monarchy. In these, the Caliphate was an historical and a technical legal specification, to be discussed below.²⁰

Thirdly, the construal of sectarian differences—and the early Muslims were much exercised by internecine political struggles which yielded politico-religious sects—as crucial points of departure for the genesis of political theory is questionable for parallel considerations. Though there is some truth to Watt's statement that Muslims tend to express political theory in the form of history (Watt, pp. 36–7), this is true only in the sense that present differences and political ideas in place sometimes tend to be recast in or to be associated with the form of elegiac or revanchist recollections of and meditations upon ancestral justices and injustices, particularly with the early Arab disputes over leadership and the resultant civil wars of the seventh century. Thus, as with the solicitation of and appeal to the canon, past events are quoted in support of or in opposition to this or that position, and a line of filiation, often of an imaginary order, is made into a justificatory argument. Moreover, such meditations and recollections are only a component in articulating sectarian differentiation, not the conceptual foundation of Islamic political thought, which emerges from elsewhere. One would certainly have wished that scholars dealing with the political teachings of Muslim sects were aware of work done in other historical areas which have direct comparative, conceptual and methodological bearings on this. One might signal here only the very beginning of such work, undertaken with a socio-historical approach, with the distinctions it makes between the sociological and the historical on the one hand, and the dogmatic and the theological on the other,²¹ distinctions, as we shall see, effaced by the scholarship under review.

These considerations from anachronism alone would vitiate the assumption that Islamic history might in its most important features have been “derived” from Muhammad and the Muslim canon in any but a tokenistic, rhetorical manner, which is of course no less effective

in generating pathos for being so. This is quite apart from considerations of credibility, which disallow human histories, apart from the history of some subcultures constituted as “textual communities,” from being founded, governed, and delimited by a Book, and even then the relationship between Book and what ostensibly derives from it calls for elaborate treatment. What would transpire, therefore, is that there is at play the continuing effect of an institutionally transmitted historiographic doctrine that governed, until recently, construals of Islamic history in general, including the history of Islamic political thought, and some comment in this regard will be called for here.

The readiness to tolerate anachronism and other departures from the standard requirements of historical scholarship overall in studies of Islamic history arise from the exigencies of a particular narrative construction and conceptual apprehension of this history. The coherence of this approach requires the often counter-factual and implausible reiteration and reassertion of certain motifs and patterns for conceiving the succession and concatenation of major historical events. It occasions the correlative marginalization of central facts and patterns of events—broadly conceived, in all manner of duration—as will become readily apparent from what follows. “Islamic” history is generally construed as the sudden, unearthly explosion of a religion and a massive movement of conquest, upon the face of a very large part of the world, comprehended by “religion” lodged in a Book and other canon and, in lesser proportion, “Arabian traditions,” both components acting as a kind of genetic program arising from the moment of origin. Being complete at its bibliocentric and auxiliary Arabian tribal beginning, and being taken to have been entirely constrained by the conditions of its scriptural and geo-ethnological genesis, it results that its subsequent history is implicitly seen to be a series of glosses on these beginnings, a drama with predetermined roles, and sometimes an almost self-parodic psychodrama, resulting in an historical narrative structured along the lines that mirror the epic genre, as an anti-epic—very much like satire, caricature, and polemic, epic and its negative double operate by an exaggeration in the scale of selected elements and fragments, which are then metonymically taken to stand for the whole. In narrative terms, such discourse on history is single-stranded, appearing to the reader not as perspective as much as a series of standardized bas-reliefs.²²

I. 3. Snares of origins

What was said above in the course of sketching the narrative chronological components of the books under consideration devolves therefore, more substantively, to the following. "Islamic" history is seen to have been born somehow complete, the energies as arise from its beginnings spent within a short time, with little to sustain them along the course of time but various forms of repetition which, with the effects of entropy, can then be comprehended by categories of disorientation ("coping"), decrepitude, sclerosis, and decline.²³ Thus typically, in commonly-used textbooks as in the books under consideration here, a skeletal narrative structure with much uneven flesh is put forth as a chronotopical backbone from which political theory, like religious and other histories, are elicited in corresponding sequence, as direct manifestations and epiphenomena. This is in turn grafted upon two unreflected periodizations woven together, the one dynastic, and the other a scheme of rise and decline. The former is common in the writing of political history, the latter in sketching cultural and religious histories that are not often distinguished enough.

According to this image, diagrammatically represented in structural outline, Muhammad and his immediate successors appear, Book in one hand and Bedouins towed by the other, explode upon the vista of world history, set up a polity in Medina and ultimately a tribal state in Damascus, enter into internecine bloody conflicts which spawn sects with attendant politico-religious views; these views come to serve as "political thought" in works such as those under discussion here. Then the Abbasids appear, reckon unsuccessfully and ambivalently with the mixed heritage of their Medinan and Umayyad epigones, lose control of both Book (to the *'ulamā* and their *sharī'a*) and tribal muscle (to Turkic Praetorians and foreign dynasts). They thus come rapidly to occupy a world of make-believe, while the original genetic impulse, which is Islam, congeals ponderously into unworldly, pious malaise, and is played out on the street, now that people have become Muslims led by the *'ulamā* who, by virtue of speaking for the Book, husband the imprint of Muslim origins upon the masses, setting Muslims against the state, or at the very least disconnect them from it, and propound an outlook of autocephalic disengagement more reminiscent of the Anabaptist doctrine of Separation than of medieval Muslims. Politics wallows in bloody, un-Islamic vainglory, greed, injustice and hubris, while what the books under discussion describe as "Islamic political thought" devolves rather to what might more appropriately be likened to a carping, apolitical ecclesiology.

From this narrative scheme of the history of Islam derives the specification of Islamic political thought: its topics are derived from the worldly misadventures of the Muslim religion over time. Starting with dogma and legal institutes ostensibly associated with it, Islamic political thought at once emanates from and is spawned by sectarian impulses and by what religion is presumed scripturally to require, and rapidly and determinedly settles into largely apolitical morosity on the part of the *'ulamā*, while tyrannical praetorian parvenus and conquering princes from the east luxuriate in un-Islamic theories of kingship and suspend the Caliphate in an ethereal unreality. In response to this, some of the *'ulamā* again try to recover what might be salvaged of the imprints of origin, by producing for the Caliphs wildly dreamy and ultimately opportunistic theories about the public order, with their imagination the only means they have of "coping" with new circumstances. It is clear that this pattern of the history of Islamic political thought, following on the heels of the broader historical narrative skeleton outlined, is fully reflected in the books under discussion here.

Albert Hourani had many years ago made the link, however implicitly, between periodization in terms of the chronotopoi of rise and decline, and conceiving the historical category "Islam" as a persistent "culture,"²⁴ commonly reduced to religious beliefs and summary commands and prohibitions, with the history of Muslims over-determined by the full amplitude of their religion's definitive beginning. This link was confirmed and made in more explicit detail by other writings subsequent to Hourani.²⁵ In this perspective, historical causality, being endogenous to Islam as such and governed by a genetic imperative, devolves to what biblical scholarship knows as typology, and the history subsequent to the moment of genesis stands as so many diminished figures of this very beginning. Not unlike typology, such a temporal effulgence of origin has a magical analogue in the notion of action at a distance, and like magic, it violates the principle of sufficient reason by emphasis on the symbolic, adventitious and circumstantial. Thus one of our authors quotes with approval V. S. Naipaul's insistence on "the flow of origins" throughout Islamic history (Black, p. 341), what the renowned orientalist scholar H. A. R. Gibb, with exquisite censoriousness, called the "kernel of derangement [in] Islamic society."²⁶ If one wished to investigate genealogies to this perspective, one would need to look closely into positions developed in the nineteenth century, very well exemplified by Wilhelm von Humboldt and Ernest Renan, in which racial stock, language, and religious characteristics are coterminous and deterministic, with germinal origins playing a very decidedly

deterministic role with respects to terminal outcomes²⁷. Paradoxically, this perspective construes the ethnogenetic beginnings of Islam and the course and outcomes of Muslim history to be conceptually equivalent; historical developments embody at best the unstable results of clashes and of maladroit adjustments to ambient reality, but have no consequence for the construal of the impulse of origins or its imprint.

Unsurprisingly given the hyper-coherence attributed to Islam *ab initio*, its condition of perpetual decline, when no allowance is made for the complexity of historical periodization, can only be catastrophic, or alternatively long-drawn and pathetic. In the schema under discussion, the former applies to politics, the latter to political thought and to culture more generally, and appears on close scrutiny to be less a process than a permanent condition. What is most often forgotten in explanations in terms of origin is that, without the mediation of time and circumstance, the explanation would violate the principle of sufficient reason: there must be reason why origin might be effective to the measure indicated; otherwise its action at a distance in time would amount to magic.

I. 4. Historiographic lineages

There is indeed a very distinguished lineage to views of Islamic history just outlined, in which heroic moment of the beginning rapidly become anti-heroic narrative of misadventure stretching over many centuries. We find such views expressed by Voltaire, Herder and Hegel, who ought not to be underestimated as historians, and by Ranke, Renan and Burkhardt, among many others. In terms of historical doctrine, what we have in the books under discussion is the implicit restatement of the romantic, vitalist philosophy of history out of which emerged, most rigorously in Germany from the late eighteenth century, variants of politico-historical scholarship known as *Kulturkreistheorie* and *Weltanschauungslehre*, notions of cultural morphology associated with figures such as Herder, Hamann, de Bonald, von Humboldt, Burkhardt, Ernst Troeltsch, and Oswald Spengler, and with different inflections and parameters, with figures such as Hegel or Ranke.²⁸

Each such “cultural sphere,” such as “Islam” or “the West,” is essentially homeostatic and possesses a constant culture-morphological pattern. Its history is essentially the measure of fidelity to origins, here the Koran and the Muhammadan example, allied to tribesmen, for history is here replaced by an ethnology of “cultural patterns.” History is construed endogenously, and chronologically and geographically adja-

cent histories being adjudged incommensurable. History becomes a vast space of ethnological classification.²⁹ That which is out of conformity with supposed primal impulses and energies lodged in the culture-morphological pattern is taken for being merely exogenous, the corrupting or otherwise complicating “influence” of heterogeneous impurity, and historical transformations are denuded of their specific gravities and taken for variations on an invariant origin, or otherwise as what Spengler termed pseudomorphism, resulting from external impurities, Hellenism in medieval Islam and “westernization” in modern times. The latter is seen typically as provoking a “crisis of identity” leading to a “return” to Islam of which fundamentalism is an extreme but adequate manifestation—heedless of the problems attendant upon using trans-historical notions of identity, or of the fact that Islamic civilization, like the Greek or the Roman, no longer exists except as a bookish memory. It is such a conception which renders Black’s (and others’) treatment of modern “Islamic political thought” very questionable.

This last misrecognition of history cannot detain us here, and the salience of these specifications for the purposes of this article reside in the inference, implicit or explicit, that historical itineraries—Islamic and Western, for instance—are in essence intransitive. Being such, they are seen only contrastively to sustain a comparativist perspective—diachronic comparativism as in the study of historical continuities and mutations (periodization), and the synchronic comparativism associated with anthropology and historical sociology. Lurking behind contrastive comparativism in history is of course one of two narratives against which the Islamic is measured. The older one is that of the rise to world-historical centrality of the Romance and Germanic peoples, which has a certain geo-historical plausibility in terms of modern world history, when shorn of notions more proper to the nineteenth century. The newer one, arising out of political conditions subsequent to the Second World War and gaining renewed political energy recently, is that of “Judeo-Christian” tradition. The term, given historical definition in a Protestant setting, has salience and relevance to biblical typology and is of considerable ideological density today, particularly in the US and more recently in Europe, but it carries little historical verisimilitude. In all, this romantic historical doctrine tends also to calque the oppositions proposed by Muslim neo-traditionalism in modern times: historical discourses structured by the opposition of purity and adulteration, the indigenous and the exogenous, the authentic and the inauthentic, the autonomous and the heteronomous.³⁰

That this deeply conservative theory of history should form the renewed basis of writing the history of Islamic political thought is perhaps to be expected at a time of neo-conservatism of various hues—neo-conservatism being here understood as the recuperation of conceptions discredited until recently, and their tart and sometimes almost festive reassertion, as if this were a triumph for what had always been obvious, but had been in abeyance because of the deleterious impact of leftists, anti-orientalists and other assorted sources of mystification. Neo-conservatism in western Islamic studies is here the reassertion of an older inertial conceptual energy internal to the Islamic studies establishment after a period of experimentation, often innovatively if sometimes with dubious cognitive results, that followed the publication in 1978 of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, against the backdrop of a culturalist and civilizational turn in the humanities, a turn not unrelated to conceptions (and some practices) of international politics.

In this culturalist and civilizational perspective on history, in which both xenophobia and xenophilia mirror one another in their claim for generic differentiation between Islam and the West, the related notions of incommensurability and immemorial incompatibility are figures of the imagination which often structure conceptually both the dialogical and the conflictualist or social-Darwinist parties (of the latter, one might mention crucially Professor Bernard Lewis³¹ and assorted Evangelical Ministers and neo-conservatives in the US) to this civilizational turn.³² For the latter, a martial or potentially martial perspective on present-day international politics (clash or war of civilizations) requires an historical narrative of perennial adversarialism born of generic incompatibility, in the form of an historical account of "Islamic" civilization so radically exotic, irrational and menacing, as to require a very special effort to render it comprehensible to the "western reader."

One last observation concerning this neo-conservatism is in order before going further. This concerns the general antipathy of venerable vintage, still persisting among some scholars of Islam, to what is vaguely known with disparagement and alarm as "theory." This betokens an insular inclination to, and a preference for, a cherished marginality arising partly from the undemanding comforts of institutional marginality in which Islamic Studies had for long found itself, recently encouraged by demands from the public for knowledge of the apparently strange phenomenon of Islam, appearing to this general public as daily becoming more and more eccentric and perplexing.

The effects of conceptual and institutional marginality had already been noted by Hourani and others. Such marginality yielded work by

scholars of Muslim history who, in Hourani's words, "other historians would [not] recognize as historians sharing in their historical culture," taking over the "commonplaces of the general culture and information of their age"³³—what Marcel Mauss had long ago termed a "*sociologie inconsciente qui encombre l'histoire vulgaire*."³⁴ Thus, common demotic assumptions about Islamic history, and particularly assumptions of incommensurable exoticism, are still given expert voice by some representatives Islamic studies institution, and make their way into the mainstream of scholarship, even of usually discerning and critical scholarship, deferentially content with unexamined certainties emerging from this particular field of study and general expertise.³⁵

A corollary of the romantic historical doctrine that has just been discussed, crucial for the purpose of this article, is that the categorization of empirical materials whose history is written, the construction of historical objects and topics, is still seen by some, despite recent advances in orientalist scholarship, to yield a sui-generic culture called Islam, from which follows the implicit proposition that the history of political thought must spring from this culture, just as did "Islamic society," "Islamic economics," and the "Islamic city" in a previous time. All of these, and their cognates, are habitually deduced from texts of a religious character, which come to stand in for the history implicitly thought to mirror them. Histories of this kind are endogenetic, with outcomes decided by geneses yielding continuity and repetition, consideration of which replaces historical causality. This amounts to anachronism, of course, and reflects more the conceptual apparatus which structures traditions internally than historical concepts which are called upon to consider these³⁶ and to explain them. After all, "traditions" are hypotheses in narrative form put forward to account for what appears to modern scholars, and what appeared to medieval divines, as rituals of repetition, when they were in fact the form of presenting novelties construed as continuities with the past—repetition and interpretation are in many ways functionally equivalent in the construction of coherent traditions. Various matters can be and are expressed within traditions, but not necessarily *on account* of such traditions. Explanation cannot be of the same order as the object of explanation, nor use its language; correlatively, historical narration cannot be united with the document on which it is based, and cannot simply be its paraphrase or summary.

One final point of method needs to be addressed briefly, in somewhat abstract terms that will be sustained concretely later, when the substantive historical discussion is continued. This concerns the way

in which the history of political thought, and intellectual history more broadly considered, are approached. We find that the history of Islamic political thought as expressed in the books discussed here is written according to canons of intellectual history that prevailed before the discovery of historical anthropology, the history of religions and of mentalities, the sociology of knowledge, the techniques of textual analysis, conceptual and rhetorical, and the pragmatics of discourse, beyond what the elementary positivistic philology that predominated in Islamic studies until recently permitted.³⁷ When recourse is made to the contextualization of political ideas, this is generally undertaken as what one might term lazy contextualization, and is generally done with implicit reference to a very “soft” conception of ideology as the simple mechanism of instrumentalization and justification, without recourse to the more elaborate and more effective manners of approaching contextualization.³⁸

In procedures such as those informing the books under discussion, little deliberate attention is paid to the complexities of intellectual history or the history of ideas in general, or to correlative techniques of reading,³⁹ with little distinction made between topoi, articulated concepts, symbolic and indexical notions used as ritual refrains, and stock phrases, and hardly any attention is directed to historical-anthropological approaches, to notions of mentality, to the import of political ritual, and much more. Little distinction is made between ideas of seemingly uniform propositional content that may be expressed in different settings and discursive locations. The complex discursive and socio-political relation between descriptivism and prescriptivism in medieval Muslim writings on politics is simplified to the polarity of identity and contradiction. “Ideas” are taken simply for discrete propositional utterances, irrespective of the pragmatics and aesthetics of their reception, and little or no distinction is made between types of utterances and concepts—matters from which considerable instruction would have been derived from medieval Arabic semantics and rhetoric. One need not hold a particularly abstruse view of textuality in order to realize that a text (including a text discussing matters political) is more than the sum of its discrete statements, and that it is more than an archive.

The self-presentation of a group holding particular ideas is thus taken as an adequate study of these ideas, in keeping, in this particular case, with the perfect correspondence of “Muslim society” to the political ideas it spawned, to the extent that the statements of Watt and Crone that they seek to read ideas into political practices and to uncover implicit assumptions (Watt, p. x; Crone, p. ix) transpires to be less the read-

ing of practice than radical simplification of the relationship between theory and practice, by postulating correspondence between them: direct correspondence in which theory merely “expresses” practices that are somehow instinctive and programmed by origins, or indirect, in which theory is taken for merely apologetic and justificatory positions called “legitimation.” Black expresses such implicit assumptions well when he states that, with respect to Muhammad’s polity, “the irony was that the Muslims had little in the way of political theory to inform what they were doing” (p. 10). What remains is religion, articulated in this kind of historical writing as an imperative and invariant cultural pattern closer to instinct than to deliberative action in political, social, cultural, doctrinal and imperial contexts.

In light of the above, we might usefully move on to the categorization of an historical object called “Islamic political thought.” The key to this categorization lies in the Islamic character attributed to it as its constitutive *differentia*. Islam thereby not only constitutes historical objects, but renders them self-explanatory *qua* Islamic. Islamic political thought starts with Islam, not with the history of political ideas nor from political practices, almost as if the name, Islam, conjures up a history. “Theologocentrism” had for long been a common preference in western studies of Islam.⁴⁰ Now Islam is, of course, indubitably a religion. But it is also a name attributed, often as shorthand or for some other convenience, including ideological convenience, to a certain historical order, to a culture and civilization, to a presumed form of social organization, to certain peoples, and to much else. Moreover, religion, including Islam, is not only canon and interpretation, and not merely catechism and simple litany, but also bespeaks cult, devotional styles, dogmas over which discord is lively, social institutions, forms of authority, ethical precepts, myth, magic, and much else, all of which vary greatly over time, place, social group, and according to a variety of other criteria.

All these distinctions are to a considerable degree effaced if Islamic history, culture and society were to be reduced to the religion whose name they are made to bear, and most particularly effaced if this religion is in turn reduced to its canon, heedless of Arnold Toynbee’s prescient proposition that the Koran is but “stony ground” for institutional and legal development.⁴¹ This is also heedless of Albert Hourani’s gentle warning that “words like Islamic history do not mean the same things in different contexts ... in no context are they enough in themselves to explain all that exists. In other words, ‘Islam’ and the terms derived from it are ‘ideal types,’ to be used subtly, with infinite reser-

ventions and adjustments of meaning, and in conjunction with other ideal types, if they are to serve as principles of historical explanation.” He adds with approval, as a corrective, the suggestion made by Claude Cahen that historical categorization in terms of concrete geographical or temporal qualifiers such as medieval, pre-industrial, Mediterranean, or Near Eastern would be far more adequate than “Islamic.”⁴² Clearly, careful consideration of the complexity of large-scale historical units is an essential desideratum which is not met with sufficient frequency.⁴³ After all, one rarely reads of Christian political thought, except for certain theologically focused political writings of the Church Fathers, but rather of Late Antique, Byzantine, and medieval political thought, even with reference to the political writings of monks writing for other monks, and one reads not of religion constituting imperial political thought, but of religion and the rhetoric of empire.⁴⁴

In light of the above, a more precise orientation in the accounts of Islamic political thought might have been obtained had their subjects been properly constituted, not of putative continuities with, and variations on, canonical texts, but in terms of spatial or temporal parameters: political thought under the Baghdad Caliphate, for instance, or notions of worldly authority propounded by various Muslim sects, or concepts of royalty in relation to ceremonial. In the books under discussion, the political thought of Muslim sects, is put forth as “Islamic political thought” *tout court*, in distinction to un-Islamic influences on “Islamic” political thought. The chance to constitute the topics in political thought properly speaking in social, discursive, political and other contexts of their deployment—power, order, monarchy, empire, authority and allied topics—is thereby lost.

As in medieval Latin political thought,⁴⁵ Islamic “political thought” is not defined and delimited in terms which came to attach to it with its constitution as an academic discipline, awaiting scholars of the twenty-first century to summarize it. Medieval Muslims’ political notions and the topics they treat need to be reconstructed from a wide variety of writings, not all political nor necessarily religious, but comprising also belles-lettres, epistolary literature, poetry, legal works, philosophy, historical writings, official documents, courtly ceremonial, numismatic evidence, and much more. Out of these can emerge notions of the state (*dawla*), of politics as statecraft, as *politikē technē*, of hierarchy, of order, of empire, all of which would be truncated if they were not regarded as transversal themes cutting across sectarian divisions, and as being born of political conceptions properly speaking in con-

nection with practices. "Political thought" is not as apt in this regard as political conceptions or political enunciations.⁴⁶

This reductive, origin-obsessed approach to political thought, schematizing by repeating the refrains of the Sunni mainstream and of various sectaries, has as a most significant result, then, the obscuring of overarching and transversal themes: conceptions of power, of order, of ecumenical empire, of authority. While sectaries dwelt at length on ancestral disputes, on themes of legitimism, on various instances of justice and injustice, which might be the subject of works of social, political history and religious history, the more interesting topics pertaining to political thought properly so called are not generally given the centrality due to them in the works giving occasion to this discussion: themes of monarchy, of universal salvation history, of imperialist universalism, of social order, generally treated in the books under discussion simply as functions of sectarian difference or of religious thought, without proper systematic consideration in terms of political thought. The theme of monarchy in relation to salvation history is especially crucial for the proper appreciation of classical and medieval Muslim political conceptions, as of the Christian, in which *imitatio Christi* or *Christomimesis*, the Imitation of Christ, plays an important role. This is a scheme in which caliphal monarchy stands for and figures prophecy in the medium of historical time, all the while deriving direct sustenance and election from God. But this theme of typology is almost entirely absent from standard scholarship.

As has been suggested, this kind of treatment of historical materials pertaining to Islamic political thought is to some extent related to a direct and fairly elementary philological approach to reading medieval texts, generally eschewing textual and conceptual analysis in favor of paraphrase or lexical explication. Thus, for instance, with respect to the all-important notion of *dawla*, a politico-historical notion indicating "dominion," "reign," "Reich," "dynasty," and generally translated as "state," the very first citation in Crone's book (p. 4), in what is perhaps appropriate homage, follows Professor Lewis in giving this crucial notion short shrift, by blithely deferring the matter of meaning not so much to the history of usage, but in the manner of medieval Arab lexicographers to the senses conveyed by the Arabic triliteral root *d-w-l*, which yields the sense of "a turn of fortune," among many others. Thus resting content with vague semantic associations rather than closer scrutiny of the complex relation between Arabic morphology and the Arabic lexicon in effect empties the term *dawla* of determinate historical sense or conceptual shape, much like scrutinizing the notion of rev-

olution in the political thought of the nineteenth century by baldly stating it “meant” return to a point of departure. But the history of concepts, or indeed of institutions, cannot be derived from the history of words, let alone in facile manner from Arabic triliteral roots,⁴⁷ for as the relation between words, concepts, and their use is very complex, so are the relations between Arabic semantics and morphology all the more complex. An analysis of the historical, discursive, institutional and political uses of this term, as a bearer of semantic fields, as a concept of order, as a technical administrative term, as an historiographic category inserting politics in the medium of time, would have yielded far richer material for the analysis of medieval Islamic political thought, both at certain crucial junctures,⁴⁸ and with reference to notions of the state, of monarchy, and of dynasticism. Conceptions of the state are, partly as a result, conspicuously absent from Crone’s book, and indeed from Black’s, who does however use the word “state” in entitling a major portion of his book. Full treatment of the term *siyāsa*, politics and statecraft, would have been another desideratum. In what follows, a number of central themes arising from recent systematic literature on Islamic political thought will now be taken up in turn. These themes are dealt with fairly uniformly in the books under consideration.

II. Thematic commonplaces and the frames of history

II. 1. Egalitarian Arabs and Muslim empires

It has been suggested that works on Islamic political thought under discussion habitually start their solicitation of Muslim origins’ indelible mark with the paleo-Islamic polity of Muhammad and his immediate successors. In terms of supposed Arabian traditions, these are usually characterized as communitarian and egalitarian, with the polity headed by a *primus inter pares*. It is also presumed that this polity answered to the social patters of nomadic tribesmen, despite the well-known antipathy of Muhammad and his companions, townsfolk to the man, towards nomads, regarded as fractious and congenitally godless.

Thus the conditions that made for the genesis of Islamic political thought is confined to vaguely-conceived religious precepts and to “Arabian traditions,” deleting in effect the crucial salience of the apparently “foreign” Persian norms and practices and universalist notions of the *Panbasilea* and its historical and political theology. This position is crucial to the formation of the narratives of Islamic political thought

under scrutiny, and necessarily precludes the scrutiny of historical growth, interaction, and transformations, great and small, apart from the contrastive register of the supposedly native and autochthonous, and the influence coming from “outside.” Historical scrutiny properly conceived would by contrast regard Islam and Islamic political thought as historical movements occurring wherever Muslim polities took root, rather than autarchic phenomena emanating from a book and the desert.

In this process of adaptation, acculturation, growth, and transformation, out of which Islamic political thought emerged, *ab initio* in forms and by conceptual means not specifically Islamic, history has none but symbolic loyalty to origins, particularly as interaction and acculturation was as intense as it was in the case of the Arab conquests and their imperial aftermath. History rather voraciously acquires and digests unfamiliar matters and elements that are not “original” and, with time, with the passage of centuries in the case of Islamic political thought,⁴⁹ endows them with homely genealogies. There is much more to the name “Islam” than a few vaguely-defined marks of origin. Furthermore, apart from the bare text of the Koran and some prophetic traditions of ascertainable authenticity, there is little in Islam as an historical phenomenon that is uniquely Arabian, Arab, or “original.” Rather, a more historical model of interpretation would be one in which an imperial and royalist *koine* was commandeered to construct Islamic political concepts, much like the *koine* of Roman provincial law which led to the formation of certain legal traditions⁵⁰: conceptual Islamisation was retroactive, a work of the imaginary, and a telescoped political genealogy.

Where the much-vaunted Arab traditions are concerned, scholars of Islamic political thought have clearly preferred to share with their readers an implicit cliché of the proud and frugal egalitarian Arab⁵¹ than to consider more exact ethnographic and historical studies of Arab tribalism. The Arabs of Muhammad’s time were various, with city-dwellers, nomads, and tillers, with very different forms of social and political organization, extending over a vast geographical zone. Some groups were relatively autarchic, isolated and primitive, others divided among aristocrats and a variety of lower orders, while yet others had lived under elementary monarchical regimes and sustained royalist and quasi-royalist arrangements, cults of kingship of various descriptions, phylarchies, and many other polities. To impute to them all a unitary ethos, and an idyllic and vigorous egalitarianism, is implausible. When and where this confluence of tribalism and sectarianism occurred, as with the marginal Kharijites who have been a favored

object of study for European scholars of Islamic political thought, it was the result of competition for resources and influence within the state, without which tribes as political actors would be inconceivable, rather than of continuity with a supposed initial condition of origin.

Medieval Muslims are perhaps more reliable guides to the realities of tribalism than some modern commentators. Thus for instance, the Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–833) is very suggestive regarding these realities at his time. He is reported to have said that Rabī'a, a socially, economically and ecologically complex notional confederation of east and north-east Arabian tribes, "were angry with God" ever since He chose to cause His Prophet to be born into another nation (Mudar, to whom belonged Quraish, among whom emerged Muhammad, the Umayyads and the `Abbāsids), and thus had a propensity towards Kharijism.⁵² Al-Ma'mūn's statement was of course self-serving in lumping together in the attitude of anger towards God the major Rabī'a tribes of Taghlib and Bakr (no friends of his) together with other Rabī'a clans who, unlike these two, had Kharijite involvement in varying measure. But nevertheless the implication is that sectarianism was less the result of congenital "egalitarian" behavioral patterns than of balances of political forces and alliances within the state—alliances of "tribes" whose names may have been ancient, but whose alliances, and sometimes whose very existence as specifically named political entities and certainly their genealogies, were subject to shifts, internal differentiation, adjustments and telescoping in the context of changing conditions. Genealogies connected with the reconfiguration and consolidation of politico-genealogical groups was a function of migrations associated with the Arab conquests and resultant changing alliances, the formulation of which is perhaps inconceivable and irretrievable "in the wild," outside the ambit of state histories, and particularly of the state register of soldiery and of pensions (*diwān*) and the context of genealogical literature, as recognized by both classical Arabic and modern scholarship. Genealogies are performative texts in the form of aetiological tales, like other denominators of identity, including "Islam."⁵³ It should be stressed, moreover, that it was not "tribes" that became Kharijites, but certain clans and sections thereof, according to geographical location, political involvement, socio-economic position, and much else, which constitute the social elements of sectarian movements, without a serious consideration of which sectarianism would not be amenable to the historical understanding.⁵⁴

Yet this topos of tribesmen fulfils a specific function in the construals of Islamic political thought under discussion here, where it con-

stantly appears as a refrain, without regard to time or place. This discursive function is one of simplification upon which is premised the attribution to Muslims of a congenital communalist ethic, and to flatten out Islamic political thought in general and endow it with a core of declamatory pietism.

It is therefore important to realize that a perspective such as that outlined obscures, in the name of originality and autochthony, the mainsprings of the historical elaborations of the Muslim religion, and by the same token the mainsprings of the political thought spawned by Muslim polities. According to the normal conceptions associated with historical writing, political thought under the Islamic signature is to be sought rather in the widening circles of acculturation and the elaboration and interpretation of the emergent canon in light of political practices and ideas in place, this place being not so much Medina and Mecca as Damascus and Baghdad, heirs to very ancient royalist and monarchical traditions, institutional, symbolic, and discursive, in the light of which later developments were construed as original.

Thus for example political and gnomological literature attributed to Greek and Persian sages came with time to be attributed to Muslim authorities, in the same way as prophetic traditions generated in the eighth century were attributed to earlier times, and in which the persons of Muhammad, `Alī and others themselves became *topoi* to which were attached current practices, and indeed as *hadīth* itself is a mass of exempla attributing to Muhammad later practices, dogmatic statements, and myths. There is a strong case for looking at Islamic political thought as an *interpretatio Islamica* of Late Antique kingship, and of classical Islamic culture as *interpretatio Islamica* of cultures in place, just as in the process of acculturation natural to human societies as they change, triumphant Christianity produced an *interpretatio christiana* of what was in place, including exempla and political arrangements.⁵⁵ That very many aspects of Arab imperial culture and society, Umayyad and `Abbasid, is in fact an *interpretatio islamica* of Late Antiquity is a line of research that has reached critical mass, and now requires an initial systematic statement.⁵⁶

It is not so much constraint within a poor and rather primitive original scheme of tribalism and elementary monotheism that is crucial, but the way in which traditions, and most particularly royalist, absolutist traditions and traditions of sacral kingship in place, came to be symbolically inserted in an Islamic textual and historical genealogy, and came to constitute “memory,” and historical “memory,” it must be remembered, itself has a history, constituted of practice, fancy, desire,

interest, oblivion, and the imaginary. This is the case with all traditions with their telescoping and rhetorical procedures, and indeed with their invention, a theme which has become standard in modern historical scholarship. And though it is true, as the books under discussion would have it insistently, that many Muslim divines execrated kingship, this remained largely a pietistic polemical motif for use in jeremiads, and does not constitute political thought any more than does the execration of kingship in the Bible (for instance, and very famously, Samuel 1:8) found Byzantine or Latin theories of kingship. But what this means and implies seems altogether to have escaped discussions of this theme: what was the target of polemic for a variety of reasons was the title *malik*, usually translated as “king.” But this title was infrequently used before it became rather common in Syria and Egypt from the twelfth century, and even then usually for subaltern princes rather than what we might call kings though it was also used by sovereign sultans as regnal subtitles—it might be interesting to note that the title of the famous pietistic and eminently Sunni *Fürstenspiegel* of al-Turtūshī (d. 1126 or thereafter) is generically and unapologetically addressed to *mulūk*, the plural form of *malik*, as was that of al-Ghazālī, much quoted by Crone. One might note, moreover, that the kings of Saudi Arabia and their Wahhabi *‘ulamā*, rigorously pietistic and traditionalist, inflexibly Sunni and not given to self-irony, have no problem with kingship or with the term *malik*.

Nevertheless, some modern scholarship has taken the facile but entirely illegitimate route of making the term *malik* cover all supreme instances of political authority, thus misdirecting the gaze and entirely misconceiving the whole question, and indeed unconscionably proposing a false question, inferences from which went on to cast a mystificatory historical argument which permeates and in many ways structures the books under discussion. The anti-*malik* polemic by no means vitiated the construal and veneration of Muslim monarchy and royalty, of Caliphism and Sultanism, both forms of *mulk*, royalty and royal authority, nor does it justify downgrading or otherwise rendering marginal or “inauthentic” the producers of political thought other than that of some Muslim divines. Equally unjustifiable, most crucially, is it to ride roughshod over the fact that Caliphs, though sometimes referred to individually as *sultan*, were not regarded merely as kings, but as sovereign emperors of a universal state whose royal dominion is a legacy they received from God, the Prophet, and their own ancestors. Not dissimilar controversies took place over the title *Basileus* as applied to Christ in the Patristic period, the New Testament being replete with

royalist epithets of Christ. But he did ultimately become, quite uncontroversially, the *Pantocrator*.⁵⁷

This tendency to prejudice historical developments is perhaps most explicitly evident in Black, in a manner which, if applied to medieval Europe, might proceed by quoting the New Testament (for instance, Acts 5:29: "we must obey God rather than man," or Rom. 13:1: "for there is no authority except from God") in order to demonstrate that kingship was merely a polemical topos with no salience to political thought, except in so far as it kept the clergy in a position of radical social, political and intellectual separation from the exercise of power. But this procedure is evident in both books under consideration, and leads to the almost irrepressible inclination to ignore material evidence that speaks against such pre-judgements and against the over-pattern-ing and the stereotypes to which it gives rise or reconfirms. For instance, as already mentioned, Black frequently expresses surprise at finding in Islamic political thought matters he would have expected only in what he takes to be a generically distinct "Euro-Christian" traditions. He asserts, for instance, that in contrast to Europe, Islamic political theory did not develop an organismic conception of the state (p. 53). Yet the texts he quotes and lists in his bibliography, perhaps most notably the writings Ibn Khaldūn, are replete with this organismic conception: metaphors abound in which different functions of the state are compared to different parts and organs of the body, more systematically discussed in the medical terms, with the state giving coherence to the body-social organism, just as the predominant humor of a particular body may be described as choleric or sanguine and give that body a particular humoural consistency.⁵⁸ Further, Black finds in the conception of human society by Ibn al-Muqaffa` (d. 759) a view that is "strangely Hobbesian" (p. 21). Yet all Muslim theories of the state and of order generally speaking, almost without exception, were explicitly based on such a bleak view of human nature.

Black's surprise and his denial alike sustain an a priori understanding of Islamic political thought which, as we have noted, arise from "Muslim societies," having themselves "emerged out of the Islamic faith" (p. 15), in a history which "began with the Qur'an" (p. 9), in which perspective it is unthinkable that certain crucial ideas in political thought might be shared by other histories. For "Islamic society" is "dedicated to the pursuit of religious knowledge" (p. 26), and Islam developed as a "stateless praxis" in a revolt against Roman and Persian etatism (p. 10). In the case of Islamic history, norms developed "from below," thus, against all historical evidence, undermining the project

of monarchical authority (p. 33), and vitiating the possibilities of historical comparison.

There are in this conception distinct echoes of Walter Ullmann's portrayal of medieval European political thought as structured along "ascending" and "descending" schemes, bracketing for the moment the points from which these schemes are said to ascend or descend. Quite apart from the fact that Ullmann's conception itself is somewhat summary and in need of serious revision,⁵⁹ though it might be of didactic value and to some extent of heuristic value, it is interesting that the denial of commensurability to Islamic political thought should be accompanied with implicit conceptual comparison with the "ascending" scheme. One might, if Medieval Latin cognates were to be sought, have more appropriately looked in another, more Platonic direction, and looked rather at the political-theological scheme proposed by Carl Schmitt.⁶⁰

Be that as it may, and without begging the question of how such anti-statist Muslim societies managed to produce far-flung absolutist empires and a formidable succession of vigorous absolutist dynasties, some of extraordinary longevity, it can be said that these assumptions simply do not stand up to historical examination. Further, having dissipated the possible leads to the core of political thought produced under Muslim polities provided by Ibn al-Muqaffa's "strangely Hobbesian" perspective, Black clearly dissipated the possibility of examining clearly, seriously and deliberately the theories of state, authority, patrimonialism (which cannot be reduced to tribalism) and royalty, whose connections underpin the main thrust of Islamic political thought and constitute its lynchpin, the point around which it coheres.

Such counter-factual assertions as Black's arise from a desire to construe Islamic political thought as at once *sui generis*, and captive to religious belief very vaguely conceived, as determined by the canon and to a smaller extent Arabian and supposedly nomadic origins which survived as "Islamic post-tribalism" which, in the view of Black and in keeping with desiderata of widespread clichés about nomads, were adventitiously tempered by patrimonialist ideas and practices (p. 20). Thus according to this conception, Muslim empires and dynasties, Caliphal and Sultanic, in view of their presumed *sui generis* propensity to decline, were based on societies communally strong but with weak and transient political structures, characterized more eloquently by Hegel as "destitute of the bond of an organic firmness: the kingdoms, therefore, did nothing but degenerate," devolving to what he so felicitously termed "ease and repose" (*Gemächlichkeit und Ruhe*) admixed with abstract violence and fanaticism.⁶¹ Politics being inexistent in

such circumstances, it is unsurprising that Black—and others—embark upon writing a history not especially of political thought, but of apolitical and counter-political thought.

As might be expected, this entire history, for all its complexity, is that of a Muslim nation “transcended at the moment it was created,” which continued in the project of transferring power “from empire to Prophet,” such that a community was created, based on the *shari‘a* designed “to determine morals, law, religious belief and ritual, marriage, sex, trade and society” (p. 9)—a mirror-image of Ullmann’s image of the medieval Papacy. Hence Black’s contention that “the irony was that the Muslims had little in the way of political theory to inform what they were doing” (p. 10).

Against such a common view, one would argue that Islamic political thought cannot really be said to have emerged before state formation or outside of it, and that the state in question is not Muhammad’s, but that of the Umayyads and the Abbasids: remote historically, geographically, culturally, and socially from Muhammad, inheritors of great empires, continuators of imperial ecumenism, legatees of a relatively short time-span of intensely accelerated history, despite their Arcadian idyll of desert Arabhood and its poetry—idylls rather betokened nostalgia, and underline distance. For though the Umayyads and Abbasids were Arab Muslims, their Islam, unlike that of Muhammad, for centuries incorporated imperial peoples along with the territories, politics and cultures of erstwhile empires, the Byzantine whom Black scarcely ever mentions, and which he tends to dissolve into a “Euro-Christian” tradition, and the Sassanid, and behind both the whole antique and Late Antique ecumenical imperial tradition, without which no consideration of Byzantine or medieval Latin political thought is thinkable. It will not do to search for the roots of “theocracy” in the Bible or in the Koran,⁶² though one will surely find textual support for it. It should come as no surprise that, being in the business of ruling, Arab dynasties first incorporated the administrative and ideological appurtenances of kingship left behind by retreating or defeated empires. “Stateless practice,” if such were to be thinkable, only came in under circumstances when imperial authority receded, as in 10th and 11th century Syria for instance, when local urban patriciates, which included *‘ulamā*, often in alliance with plebeian fraternities, ruled briefly in urban political systems not unlike those of contemporary Italian city-states.⁶³

Black does acknowledge that the Umayyads tapped into the Middle Eastern rhetoric of monarchy, but he claims that this had little support

outside court circles, and that the Islamic mainstream remained anti-monarchic (pp. 18–9). It is of course very odd to write off “courtly circles” in this fashion when speaking of politics and of political thought. Moreover monarchy under the Muslim signature in fact took on a consistent and ubiquitous expression, down to its expression popular literature (including the *Arabian Nights*, often remote from courtly circles). Indeed, if popular conceptions of political order were to be pursued, it is most likely that they will appear to be not populist but rather patrimonialist, rising from the local to the ultimate instance of patrimonialism, this last being monarchy, sacred and profane, with notions of justice and equity allied to concepts of honor and manliness reflected in popular culture, rarely implicating sharʿist notions, and ending in divine justice and retribution dispensed by monarchy. There is no evidence that popular movements of protest (some, but certainly not all sectarian movements apart) carried a notion of polity and of political leadership which was conceptually at variance with the absolutism of the Caliphate, most particularly of the sacral character of supreme leadership and the status of the supreme office as the fount and guarantor of justice and equity, and the instance of last resort.⁶⁴ Caliphs were the real and imaginary, proximate or distant instance of appeals for justice, favor and much else, very much like the Roman emperor.⁶⁵ If anything, this was accentuated by Shiʿite sectaries of all hues. Ideas of autarchic, small-scale government were confined to the margins, and this applies to both Arab and non-Arab peripheries of central control, in a manner common to all imperial histories.

Black’s argument that an imperial state ideology could not develop under Muslim polities, and that the Caliphate therefore “failed” from the mid-ninth century (pp. 29–30), when the age of praetorian anarchy began, is clearly at variance with historical fact. This is so not only because there were periods of Caliphal re-assertion following the age of praetorian anarchy, some of them quite vigorous and effective, but also because, with the exception of short periods of eclipse and humiliating control, Caliphal authority was exercised at a number of levels and in a variety of ways, some symbolic and some institutional, and yet others military and political. This authority was no less real for having receded during periods of relative military powerlessness,⁶⁶ and bears comparison with certain moments in the history of Byzantine emperors besieged by vigorous Bulgar and Serb kings or indeed of various Augusti in fifth-century Ravenna and Constantinople threatened by Germanic princes like Stilicho, Arbogast, Alaric, or Ricimer who wanted to be incorporated into *Romanitas*, an accommodation

eventually successful under Theodoric and his immediate successors—no moment in the history of the Caliphate was nearly as chaotic and anarchic as during certain periods of the history of Rome East and West, but this is not considered by historians to be sufficient reason to decree the Roman empire and its imperial ideology a sham; instability does not necessarily imply atrophy except in the perspective of the trope of rise and decline. More will be said on this later.

The source of this imperialist authority was precisely what some scholars so often deny: that the Abbasids had an hegemonic universalist and arguably theocratic imperial ideology, and sustained a presumption of the sacral character of the Caliphate which with time was elevated to ever more hallucinatory heights, ceremonially and in terms of courtly culture expressed in a variety of genres, reproduced in independent and semi-independent provinces, some very remote, in imitation of and in the name of the Caliphate, and down the line of social hierarchy. Caliphal authority was not confined to “tacit consent” for the application of penalties and the validity of contracts under Caliphal control (p. 30). Caliphal control over legal institutions was never contested, despite attempts to diminish its extent in practice by overpowering princes.

In short, the situation was neither monochromatic nor melodramatic; it was dynamic and rapidly changing, and is clearly resistant to being cut to Procrustean measure as required by the scholarly vulgate under discussion. The Caliphate was a most resilient institution; it is this which is interesting and salient to political thought, not the vagaries of events. Ecumenical, imperial Caliphal ideology, moreover, was not only disseminated in court, but also on the marketplace reflected in popular literature, and its expression involved the very *‘ulamā* whom the vulgate takes as the mainsprings of anti-state, “post-tribalist” communitarianism. All evidence points to the fact that the *‘ulamā* bought into Caliphal authority, and that, rather than emerging “from below,” which some undoubtedly did, they were not outside the ambit of Caliphal institutions and lines of patronage. Crone proposes that the *‘ulamā* came into their own against the state with the early *‘Abbasids*, and particularly with the famous persecution (*al-mihna*) of al-Ma’mūn and his successors al-Mu’tasim (r. 833–42) and al-Wāthiq (r. 842–7), in which the divines were compelled to embrace the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran in time and to abjure the thesis that it is co-eternal with God.

II. 2. Autocephalic hierocracts?

But this common assertion is surely vitiated, not only by the fact that this was not a persecution of “Sunnis” who then came to the fore, but also that it was put into effect by the *ʿulamā* themselves against other *ʿulamā*, and notably by Ibn Abī Duʿād (d. 854). There is no reason, apart from retrospective heresiographic assumptions and contemporary scholarship which often tends to embrace them uncritically, to adjudge Ibn Abī Duʿād and his associates any less “Sunni” than Ibn Hanbal (d. 855) and others victims of this persecution—historical accounts of these events have tended to be stylized, dramatized, with decidedly legendary elements.⁶⁷ Neither is there reason to attribute to Sunnism of the time a distinctiveness it acquired only later, a distinctiveness which nonetheless did not prevent it from being very much a broad church, ultimately not so much “orthodox” as catholic in outlook. What might arguably be described as proto-Sunnism came in many hues, among which Hanbalite literalism and pietism was for long a minority position which only crystallized much later, and remained a minority position throughout the classical period and the Middle Ages of Islam. That pietists sometimes refused payment for acting as judges or prayer leaders or teachers, or even refused official appointment altogether, is incontestable; there was indeed, throughout the classical and medieval Muslim periods, a pious genre of lamentation with reference alienation (*ghurba*) in an impious world buttressed by a prophetic Tradition of uncertain provenance, but it was by no means central to any social or cultural processes. The correlative discourse on *fasād al-zamān*, the corruption of the present time, the discontents of civilization and preference for the elemental, is in any case quite ubiquitous and pervasive universally. But scrutiny of such cases of deliberate disengagement from the state would reveal that this was in great measure correlated with an attitude of patrician piety and haughty aloofness on the part of divines who disposed of private incomes. For the rest, and as Ibn Khaldūn realized long ago in a famous chapter of his *Muqaddima*, the cultivation of learning of a religious nature (*ʿilm*) was always a manner of gaining livelihood. Very much unlike mendicant friars, the *ʿulamā* generally engaged in gainful employment, occasionally in trade. Remuneration for judges and other *ʿulamā*, their institutional organization, and their financial functions (supervision of *awqāf*, endowment properties) goes back to a very early period in Muslim history.⁶⁸ What rudimentary social history of Muslim societies that exists tells us indeed that there were veritable, long-lived dynasties of *ʿulamā* in state service.⁶⁹

It is unsurprising, in a patrimonial age, that scholarship of all hues should depend on patronage.

When this pietistic and theologically fideist (but by not of necessity literalist) tendency did come into prominence—but by no means to predominance—it did so when it crystallized as a legal school and theological creed under Caliphal patronage. This was a time, under the Buyid occupation of Baghdad in the late tenth and through the first half of the eleventh century, when the Caliphate was under siege with varying degrees of severity, and in the face of Buyid encouragement of plebeian Shi'ism and the consequent civil disturbances in the Caliphal capital, the caliphate tended to adopt increasingly less latitudinarian positions on matters doctrinal. Hanbalite patrician divines, favoured by the Caliphate at one point, produced official Caliphal creeds and were integrated into court, like the celebrated divine Abū Ya`lā ibn al-Farrā' (d. 1066), who acted as judge of the Caliphal harem and produced a legal treatise on government in which the lofty prerogatives of the Caliphate were sustained fully.

And though Shi'ism developed as a coherent phenomenon in some but not all respects earlier than Sunnism, what has been said about the flowering of Sunnism under Caliphal patronage would apply equally to Shi'ite patricians at the time, divines as well as litterateurs and `Alid aristocrats, in Baghdad at least, although Shi'ism is, with Crone as well as others, regarded as the very quintessence of contentions that the Caliphate is illegitimate and is to be shunned. One might mention here al-Sharīf al-Radī (d. 1009–10) and al-Sharīf al-Murtadā (d. 1044). Shi'ite patricians were appointed to high position, such as *naqīb al-ashrāf*, Syndic of the Ashrāf (descendants from Muhammad through his daughter, who enjoyed a number of privileges, including tax privileges and state subventions) and leaders of the annual pilgrimage processions (*amīr al-hajj*), and wore the black cloaks and turbans of Caliphal office. It is unsurprising that Shi'ite patricians, like their Sunni counterparts, should maintain their connection with the most patrician of patrician families (the `Abbāsids)—competition for primacy apart—at a time when the caliphal and imperial capital Baghdad had been occupied by parvenu interlopers, semi-barbarian princes and their troops, seeking a political foothold among the ragged, unwashed commoners and their semi-criminal fraternities.

Yet Crone, though aware of some of these matters, clearly prefers not to draw historical conclusions that might have ameliorated her account, and favours the constricting simplifications and the summary polemical labels of medieval polemicists, pietists and heresiographers.

She insists that “critical distancing” from the state must be taken at face value. What “critical distancing” (p. 38) as existed on the part of certain sections of traditionalist pietists cannot be legitimately overdrawn or construed as a total model. There is no evidence for the claim that the *‘ulamā*—eminently practical men, here summarily reduced to unworldly pietism or pietist activism—were the “acknowledged moral and religious leaders of the majority of Muslims” (p. 33), a corollary to the unfounded contention that they were estranged from the state. With regard to “critical distancing,” one might usefully compare this in some respects to the reserve even of state secretaries towards dealings with the moody, arbitrary, disloyal and hazardous life at court, and to their construal of the uncertainties of courtly employment as a professional hazard and an affliction with sometimes mortifying and fatal consequences to which *‘ulamā*, including Ibn Abī Du’ād and his sons, also fell victim.

The social, cultural and ideological histories of the *‘ulamā* across the vast scale of medieval Muslim polities is still to be written. Hourani already warned that the fact that the *‘ulamā* were *‘ulamā* is not sufficient to explain their historical roles, being groups of persons who held offices, enjoyed privileges, controlled massive endowments, and had specific links to various social groups.⁷⁰ The assertion that Islamic political thought was predominantly religious calls up naturally the question of its agents and carriers, mainly the *‘ulamā* according to this conception. One needs in this case to discuss the question of the Muslim hierocracy, an institution that Crone for one prefers to neutralize by referring to its members as “scholars,” thereby lodging them in a ponderous, logo-maniacal ethereality that conjures up images of remote *yeshivot* or seminar rooms.

In studying the *‘ulamā*, one might with very many qualifications liken them to a Rabbinate,⁷¹ though I prefer the term “priesthood,” because it indicates a certain historical development which started in the eleventh century and culminated in the state priesthoods of the Ottoman and Safavid states (a Shi’ite priesthood created almost from scratch, with personnel imported from eastern Arabia and south Lebanon in the later instance when the Safavids imposed Shi’ism as the state religion of Iran). Another considerations of primary salience is that this social category, internally differentiated cohesive or inchoate in different measures according to time and place, fulfilled specific functions assigned to priesthoods by the history of religions and by historical sociology, especially Weber’s, constituting what he called a “sodality.” No religion can persist, maintain its devotional arrangements and

credal armature, and police its canonical integrity and continuity without a priestly class, a class of religious specialists and professionals. That Islam did not have a priesthood—understood as a social function, not exclusively as a sacerdotal group—is an idea that can be dated to Muslim Reformism at the end of the nineteenth century. In contrast, medieval Muslim divines were quite aware of their very distinctive corporate and soteriological status, and were (and still are) distinguished by special dress. With Crone (p. 395) as well as others, the denial of a Muslim priesthood underpins the contention that Islam is entirely *sui generis*, lacking the Christian separation of church and state. This was a separation that was asserted despite the medieval European grafting of different measures of sacredness upon the *gladius* and with the royalization of the papal office, such that the *sacerdotium* acquired an “imperial appearance” and the *regnum* a “clerical touch,”⁷² and despite the Byzantine experience.⁷³ It is meant generically and rhetorically to demarcate Muslims and their history, rather than closely to scrutinize the actual and changing relations between religious institutions, sacerdotal or not, and the state.

What is moreover demonstrable in this regard is that the *‘ulamā* lacked social, political and corporate cohesion before being transformed by sultanic states between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in the central lands of Islam, into a professionalized and cohesive force. Their upper echelons were to some but not considerable extent distinct from local merchant patriciates with which they were socially intertwined, and eventually felt entitled to claim that they, rather than political authorities, were collectively the true inheritors of Prophecy as a normative system after the waning of the Caliphate, all the while, it must be stressed, affirming that the order chosen by God for the world could only be guaranteed by the state, be it Caliphal or Sultanic. The *‘ulamā* were not only *‘ulamā*; they were stratified, as society was, and belonged to a variety of social groups. They performed cultic, legal, educational, administrative and cultural functions, and fulfilled magical, mystagogic and thaumaturgical roles as well, such as performing wonders and exorcisms, and prescribing talismans. These functions were configured differently at different times and places. The *‘ulamā* were patronized by sovereigns who controlled the cultic and legal institution, and by political and military grandees as well as by patricians who founded and funded educational institutions that qualified them, employed them and gave them prominence. They were distinguished by dress and educational formation, and controlled vast properties (*waqf* endowments). Their entry into political life, and their

contribution to political thought, were correlated with these circumstances, and they cannot summarily be reduced to populists, pietists and moralists. Ultimately, they derived their official standing and authority from the Caliphate, which was the ultimate authority that certified and legitimated the legal and devotional institutions, *de jure*, and *de facto* to the extent that this was possible given medieval conditions of control and communications. The sultanic successor-states of the Caliphate perpetuated the function of the political instance as the highest institutional authority in the legal and cultic systems.

Yet the anachronism, the confusion between times which regards the *ʿulamā* as having been corporately constituted centuries before they were to be so, does not seem to dent the tropes Black wishes to sustain, with contra-factual insistence on regarding the development of Muslim jurisprudence as in good measure a successful act of establishing an authority alternative to that of the state and its imperialist and royalist ideology. For this to be possible, Muslim jurisprudence must be regarded more as a pietistic and moralistic corpus of commands and prohibitions, in which the ideological takes precedence over the legal, and in which reference to the canon is taken as literalist rather than hermeneutical, symbolic and traditionalist.⁷⁴ Correlatively, Black insists on a contrast between neo-tribalism and patrimonialism (pp. 350 ff.). Thus, for all his wide reading, and some fine observations on matters of detail, the overall picture painted by him forestalls the possible understanding of the Sunni theory of the Caliphate, and deals with this important subject on predictable traditional lines which will be discussed below.

Ultimately, Black wishes to establish a “contradiction” between “Islam” and kingship (p. 163), and wishes to use categories of interpretation and explanation that are not “alien to the participants” (p. 235). He thus eschews not only the investigation of what Muslim authors might have meant by kingship apart from what might be gathered from a rapid reading of anti-royalist polemics, but also the use of any universal categories—from intellectual history, from historical anthropology, and from other sources. Yet if it be admissible, as the author suggests, that Mehmet the Conqueror “could have been imitating the Euro-Christian ideology of Empire” (p. 205), would it not have been equally admissible to look beyond imitation into systemic concordances and continuities of the idea of ecumenical empire, beyond facile categories of East and West? Such an approach would have cleared away the fundamental presumptions that impeded Black from making central what was central to Islamic political thought, and making marginal what was historically marginal.

II. 3. *God's legitimist caravan*

Crone reproduces in more ample compass most of the arguments stated already and, following her, it would be appropriate to begin at the beginning and with the Beginning, indeed with Adam and Eve. She proposes that this might be seen as an ancestral time when, according to Muslims, a certain foundational "paradigm" for Islamic political thought was set. Crone composes an Islamic myth of creation from a variety of disparate sources, connects them in a specific narrative con-fected for this particular purpose, and declares it to be canonical and original, despite the interesting and complex variety of creation myths in circulation, which require careful handling and call up a variety of associations, contexts of deployment, and interpretive possibilities,⁷⁵ and not all of which were of vetero-testamental origin.⁷⁶ Be that as it may, Crone's myth over-interprets this supposed Beginning to make government an inescapable feature of the universe, perhaps more in the spirit of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bk. I, ch. V) than in that of medieval Muslim divines. Like the myth of the Fall, which for Augustine was the irredeemable foundation of the human condition, forever facing the unpredictability and scarcity of Grace, and causing humans, in the famous words of Luther, to be *incurvatus in se*, what Calvin (*Institutes*, Bk. II, ch. I) saw as marking Christian government as a genetic code, so does Crone see this Muslim myth declare, definitively and once and for all, all government that is not God's to be deviant and *ipso facto* illegitimate, not unlike Black's assertion of a "contradiction" between "Islam" and kingship. It might usefully be mentioned that legends of the worldly origin of monarchy and of a royal *Urmensch*, predominantly but not exclusively of Persian origin, were also in circulation, among others in the history of al-Tabarī quoted by Crone in support of her myth. It is also curious that this argument from primordialism is made a point of contrast between Islam and Christianity, and identified as the distinguishing characteristic of Muslim conceptions: medieval Christian conceptions of politics are not seen to be over-determined by such primordialism when a similar argument might be made for a similar Christian deduction of political authority from the Fall,⁷⁷ or from the royal figure of Christ in the New Testament which, in the fullness of time, was to become a political theology with Eusebius and others, a liturgical element under Theodosius, and indeed a constant iconographic motif of the Pantocrator from the fourth century onwards.⁷⁸

On the face of it, Crone's assertion that medieval Muslim political thinkers believed government to be coeval with Creation might well be unobjectionable. I will not go into the question of how legitimate it might be to posit this version of Muslim myths of creation as the starting point of political thought rather than to regard it as an argument for pious *Weltschmerz* and a component of *Heilsgeschichte* with implications for eschatology. Nor can I—as Crone might well have done—inquire into precisely when and in what sorts of contexts or genres of writing this myth, and the notion that creation and political power are coeval, were made. Nor again can I discuss that other questions relative to considering this point, namely that of the interfaces between Islamic mythology and Islamic political theory, most saliently the typological use made in Islamic political thought of the figure of prophecy in connection with the Caliphate and even more so with the Shi'ite imamate: this is a matter of capital importance for Islamic political thought which is nowhere explored in the books under consideration. Yet it would be well to be attentive to the conclusion the author draws from her assertion and into the way in which this conclusion is made to convey the overall argument of the book.

The conclusion is that only tyranny and anarchy are to be had without God's sole government, as mediated by His Messengers, the last of whom was Muhammad. Right from the start, this conclusion renders almost entirely redundant the main preoccupations of Islamic political thought, which is that of political order in general and the myriad connections between sovereign and the divinity, rather than the question of legitimacy or rather problem of illegitimacy of virtually all government which Crone's consideration of myth is intended to render central. For quite apart from commandeering the appropriate Koranic verse, that God was said to have set up Adam and by extension later prophets as His deputies on earth, and noting that this was often stated in works about politics to be the origin of polity, the solicitation by Islamic political theory of such myths, when in evidence, is due precisely to the fact that the principal preoccupation of Muslim political thinking was exercised by the problem of order rather than of legitimacy, order being equivalent to what Byzantine political thought termed *taxiarchia*,⁷⁹ and of the way in which God continued to govern beyond the time of Muhammad, through the Caliphs and the Imams.

This topic in its turn is related to the "strangely Hobbesian" pessimistic anthropology already mentioned, and the consequent need of humankind for the imposition of order in a manner indivisible, reminiscent of God's indivisible suzerainty, His *monarchia*. Prophets were

sent to advert and warn, Messengers to convey dispensations in the form of laws for the proper regulation of human sociality, and righteous monarchs to rule, at moments when the perennial human propensity to recidivism became unmanageable, and humans were in danger of returning to their fractious and savage state of nature—a conception contrary to Crone’s claim that the Muslims generally saw the state of nature as having come to an end when divine mercy provided them with the Muhammad (p. 263).

Yet overall, order of the prophetic type imposed by Messengers was not the only serviceable one to humankind, and in this context prophetic order appears as at once an historical specification of the broader category of workable order, which was of necessity monarchical and absolutist, and which almost invariably has divine sanction despite the protestations of some marginal pietists. It was also a soteriological preference, though a prophetic order was, by the broad consensus of writers on politics and history, uncommon. Indeed, the Muhammadan moment itself was usually pronounced to be peculiar, exceptional, miraculous, and out of keeping with the normal course of things, to be replayed only with the advent of the Messiah. For the rest, the perennial question of the need for order to be imposed upon an unreceptive and incorrigible humanity was central to political thought under the Caliphate and its successors. It is a question to which no perfect solution was possible given what Kant later termed the “crooked timber of humanity,” and given that sociality was an unnatural union imposed upon mankind by unsocial means.⁸⁰ This position was not unique to Islamic political thought, but was also prominent, for instance, in Augustine’s notion of violence as an instrument of salvation.⁸¹ Most important of all, it seems that the conclusion Crone derives from the mythological “paradigm” she constructs is seriously skewed: the conclusion that might legitimately have been drawn, and which was continually drawn by Muslim writers on politics, does not have to do with legitimacy, nor does it claim that only God’s government is legitimate, but rather that given the unregenerate nature of humankind, they must be ruled, and ruled continuously, by rulers who may not be God’s anointed, but who are otherwise God’s appointed, if human sociality is to continue, with legitimacy and salvation an optional extra which is not always available.

Nevertheless, Crone insists on the model of political thought whereby polity is conceived as an “all-purpose community” led by an “Imam”: this last is a very complex term historically and semantically, as complex as its cognates *princeps* and *pontifex*, but which in this book is

left captive to pietistic or, in the case of Shi'ites, vatic resonances and implications it did have, but under very determinate conditions and contexts of use.

What makes Islam and the political thought it produced unique, according to this reading by Crone and Black, is that the primary and axial concern of Muslim political ideas was not the ubiquity of government, its forms, mechanisms and origins, but the ubiquity of illegitimacy, including the illegitimacy, or the ambiguous legitimacy, of all Muslim governments except those at the very earliest period of Islam. And it should be added: in the messianic future to come, a point to which Crone does not do justice.

Religious discourses about history, the theology of history and salvation history in particular, give great weight to typologies, and Muslim typologies deployed in political discourses are far broader in remit and salience than establishing Koranic relations, as Crone does, between Muhammad and Moses (p. 16), or indeed than taking account of the Shi'ite stress on the pairs Moses/Aaron and Muhammad'/Ali, which she does not mention.⁸² But this cannot be seen reasonably to lead to the conclusion that the main concern of Islamic political thought is the question of legitimacy, or rather of illegitimacy. Legitimism and theories of the nature and functions of government are quite distinct matters, despite their occasional conjunctions. Crone is perfectly well aware that Muslim Sunni divines, and with some ambivalence Shi'ites as well, regarded all but manifestly and determinedly impious and antinomian authority to be legitimate or at least necessary for the good order of the world, and it is vexing that she inhibits herself from drawing the appropriate conclusion from this, and rather implies it could be relegated to incapacity, timidity, hypocrisy, or worse, rather than to the very foundation of their political culture.

Nevertheless, the question of legitimacy, making reference to arguments of an historical or quasi-historical character, did exercise the early sectaries. But the inordinate space given to early politico-religious sectarianism, in this and many other works on Islamic political thought, tends to underline the hyper-doctrinaire character imputed to Islamic political thought, and to the predominance, presumed to be real rather than virtual or symbolic, of its marks of origin over its actual history, topics, and concepts. In all, the two elements of this position, attributing to Islam and its political theory an autarchic character, and confining its definition of politics to pious heresiographic positions, singly and together provide a perspective which renders inaccessible and unthinkable both the major concepts that structure Islamic

political thought, and its actual history, which starts not with the Arabs and their Koran but with the Late Antique traditions of monarchy.⁸³

Thus taking sectarian self-narratives for objective historical reconstruction, sectarian political thought is removed from the history proper to political thought, and reduced to a political history of sects forlornly or neurotically pondering origins, bemoaning their loss, and in some cases seeking irredentist restitution by force. In this regard, matters not manifestly apparent to a surface reading of the Muslim canon or irreducible to presumed Arabian beginnings, most dramatically certain aspects of Shi'ite messianism, are explained in terms of extraneous contamination, by the malign Gnostic "virus" for instance (p. 81), so that doxography in this book becomes construed as a heresiography, clearly here in the spirit of the connoisseur rather than that of the censorious divine, but to the same unhistorical effect.

Clearly the model of interpretation deployed is that of accretions to and subversions of a clear Beginning, while much analytical and historical clarity might have been obtained from a reversal of perspective, whereby Islamic political thought, and Islam in general, might be seen as a repertoire of motifs, ideas and imaginings in the process of growth and development, rather than the regular or irregular conjugation of origins. The contrast with historical scholarship might be illustrated by contrast with scholarship on early Christian dogmas, in which Neo-Platonism and other elements are regarded as integral components in a process of growth, development, incorporation, adjustment and differentiation, not adjudged as primarily inauthentic and un-Christian (such a view of the inauthenticity of Christian dogma as set by Church Councils is, incidentally, crucial for Muslim anti-Christian polemics). This applies also, and most saliently for the purposes of this article, to Christian-Byzantine political conceptions in connection with their late pagan and late antique heritage.⁸⁴

The *locus classicus* for the trope of Muslims as super-Muslims irrepressibly given to brooding over origins, subversions and imperfections are two collateral questions. The first is, as we have seen, that of legitimacy as, according to Crone, no mere human had the legitimate right to impose obligations upon others (p. 315 and *passim*), this being the exclusive prerogative of the Divinity. This first question makes the main preoccupation of political thought that of tyranny—defined as ungodliness or non-godliness—and how to avoid it, in ostensible continuity with ostensible Arab habits, now that proud tribesmen have been transformed into miserable subjects (p. 145).

Apparently as a consequence, political thought, contra-factually unless political thought be confined to heresiography, is said to have become dominated by *ʿulamā*; this is the second question. Crone is well aware that a “civilian elite” of courtly literati was active in generating political thought, but this is, contrary to evidence, said to have flourished only from the third Muslim century, in conformity with the story of atavistic Arab purity in decline. In all, Crone’s discussion of the rise of “scholars” under the Umayyads (pp. 42 ff.) is impressionistic and unconvincing, with the issue prejudged rather than argued in terms of social history. The lettered classes—the intellectuals—of the early centuries are identified by her with Muslim divines, and no incongruity is discerned in the assertion of a purely sectarian understanding of politics, by divines, in the first two centuries, and the simultaneous assertion that these early intellectuals also comprised philologists, antiquarians, and others (pp. 146–7), without due mention of poets who were such important spokesmen of sacral kingship, much like state secretaries, often with a literary bent, and of course, descendants of the *grammatikoi*, and indeed courtly theologians and jurists, by far the most important among their kind for political thought. Understanding the social history of political thought in Muslim polities would have been greatly aided by a discussion of three types of cultural production under the late Umayyads and the Abbasids: *belles lettres* (*adab*), “wisdom” (*hikma*: medicine, philosophy and the natural sciences), and religious sciences (*ʿilm*). Such an understanding would have been enhanced by giving consideration to the social and political bearers of these three genres, their relations to court, the types of writings on politics they produced, and the areas in which such writings were disseminated and the pragmatics of their reception, in different times and places.

But Crone insists *a priori* on the presumed dominance of the *ʿulamā*, and on the assertion that they were somehow congenitally opposed to the state, contrary to evidence that they cannot be understood apart from the state, even the most pietistic *ahl al-hadīth*,⁸⁵ as we have seen. Such an insistence seems to be a desideratum of the historiographic model structuring this book, from which the idea arises, in the work of some scholars if not to the protagonists themselves, that the rulers in place, Caliphs and sultans alike, had “no legal status,” that they were not “intrinsically Islamic,” now that government was no longer a “mere branch of religion” (p. 146). Without considering historically the question of what might have been “intrinsically” or “extrinsically” Islamic, or if these categories were indeed of analytical

or historiographic as distinct from polemical relevance, and resting content with presumed marks of origin and of authenticity, Crone makes the strange assertion that, by the tenth century, only among the marginal Zaydis and Kharijites was the “pan-Islamic heritage” of “multi-purpose communities” still alive in its appropriate tribal environment (p. 212).

It seems peculiar that the carriers of the “pan-Islamic heritage” should be identified with the ostensibly pristine reservation of outback sectarians, except that this manner of transforming an historical fragment into a total historical type is unfortunately all too common. Yet the historiographic and narrative purpose served by this world stood upon its head is quite clear. It is thus not unnatural that the more properly historical and central “pan-Islamic heritage,” exemplified by imperial and urban Sunnism—for the Sunni, imperial *‘ulamā* are nevertheless also said to carry this heritage—is construed along lines arguably more appropriate for marginal, isolated sectaries dwelling in this remote fastness or that.

This point brings our discussion to the second of the two collateral questions that constitute the *locus classicus* for the trope of Muslims as super-Muslims, beholden to tribalist egalitarianism, that of self-regulating communalism, the cognate of Black’s “Muslim post-tribalism.” Crone believes, apparently but in all likelihood not entirely in a spirit of didacticism, that her “western reader” will be best placed to understand the Muslim *umma* or community if he or she envisaged it pictorially, as a stock scenario of Araby, according to a once apparently gorgeous, if by now musty, metaphor, that of the caravan (pp. 21 ff. and *passim*).

For not only in the beginning are Muslims said to regard themselves to be primarily members of an *umma*, but that much later, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, they saw themselves exclusively as such. All forms of social organization—kin groups, legal schools, mystical brotherhoods, doctrinal movements, and much more—were “simply” subdivisions of the *umma*. According to this conception, “Muslim society,” in the singular, was “an assembly devoted to worship” (p. 397). No mention is made in this context of social stratification, status groups, professional groups, residential groups, urban or rural households, bureaucracies, armies, or subjects of various states, among very many other things or “identities.”⁸⁶ In this ethereal world, Muslims are supposed to have set themselves up as an acephalic community, remote from the state, either brooding about the past as they worship or work with downcast eyes and broken spirits, or conducting themselves with

exemplary piety or looking forward to the millennium, cultivating the dubious “long tradition” of reading the Koran in an anti-authoritarian vein (p. 230), all the while vesting authority in nothing but religious knowledge.

This last, religious knowledge, was supposed to be dispersed equally among the believers at large, even among greengrocers from Kufa (p. 128); it was this dispersal that constituted, according to Crone, the notion of consensus, *ijmāʿ*.⁸⁷ I need not go into the intricacies of this notion of great conceptual, legal and historical complexity, or into its social histories and the social, political, cultural, and other uses to which it was put, topics which have not yet been attempted by scholarship which has not yet even occupied itself properly the mechanisms of consensus over the canonical variants of the Koran and Traditions. What is salient, though, is not only that the notion of consensus presumes in historical fact a consensus on the fact of and, to some, the necessity of disagreement and of mutual acceptance within given parameters of such disagreement—the assumption is that the Muslim community is collectively guarded from error, not unlike Gratian’s *concordia discordantium canonum*. While the latter is premised on an inner unity emerging from inspiration by the Holy Spirit,⁸⁸ the former is self-ratifying, a Great Tradition socially constituted—unlike magical constitution and certification adumbrated by Gratian, though behind the self-constitution of Muslim consensus lurks distantly some form of inspiration, or at least a vague notion of theodicy or of grace, expressed in a well-known prophetic *hadīth* concerning the inerrancy of Muhammad’s nation.⁸⁹

Consensus, crucially for this argument, was also regarded not as that of the masses, but that of the *ʿulamā*. The *ʿulamā* generally held the common mass in disdain or at best with great diffidence, and, not unnaturally given their social role and status, excelled themselves in advocating the withholding of religious knowledge—as distinct from ritual practices and the simple profession of faith—from the common run of humanity. The Koran itself was generally considered to be a text with varying grades of semantic accessibility, a fact which expresses a worldly hierarchy of knowledge and of differential capacities for understanding, and does not suggest a diffused knowledge open to all and sundry.⁹⁰ Not unnaturally, the *ʿulamā* also generally restricted the profession and discussion of dogmatic matters to those duly qualified and certified (by a formal license, *ijāza* and peer acceptance⁹¹), and the saying was very common that he who has no proper instructor has the Devil as his instructor (“*man lā shaikha lahu shaikhahu*

al-Shaitān”). Even with respect to knowledge of the very Koran, it must be stressed that, in legal terms, proper textual knowledge of it, its preservation and retention, is a collective duty incumbent upon the collectivity of Muslims, not an individual obligation incumbent upon Kufa greengrocers, however meritorious.⁹² The divines who asserted this included the great al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), to whom Crone devotes a protracted discussion, who spoke in terms of “bridling” (*iljām*) the commoners and preventing their access to theology, as in the title of one of his famous books. Not unnaturally, Crone like many others confines this reticence, which is in fact more a determined position associated with a severely hierarchical vision of society and its associated proprieties and improprieties, than a reticence, towards the philosophers (p. 187). These last are said, without good reason but in line with the polemics of a medieval anti-philosophical current of opinion, to be “inauthentic” or insufficiently Islamic, alienated and rejected or at best marginalized “within Islam,” and thus fearful of the purportedly cohesive and closed all-purpose community.⁹³ Generally speaking, Crone’s treatment of the central topic of hierarchy in Islamic political thought (pp. 334 ff.) is patchy and unsatisfactory.

So even on Crone’s assumptions, it would appear that this supposedly acephalic community turns out decisively to have a head in the shape of the priestly institution, and to be so headed in a manner which is authoritarian or at best paternalistic, rather than populist. We might add that this priestly institution, in its various times and places, is unthinkable without the state, including tensions with and ambivalences towards the state by certain of its sections, and indeed with ambivalences and ambiguities in the course of the lives of many individuals who belonged to it. It will not do at all simply to describe the situation as one in which the Caliphs were “the arm” of the “scholars” (p. 133).

But these temporal parameters are overridden when both general and specific statements are made, and chronological specification does not temper, qualify, or nuance either Crone’s over-patterned general position or her specific discussions—a pro-forma conscientious specification without overall narrative or analytical effect. Had Crone’s claims been true, of course, the great preacher, historian and divine Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200) would not have composed his famous tract against popular preachers and freelance *‘ulamā*, nor would he have intervened with his patron, the Caliph al-Mustadī’ (r. 1170–80), to control unlicensed preaching overall.⁹⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī, the quintessential Baghdad Sunni divine of his time and a Hanbalite to boot, declaimed at length on the sacred radiance of the Caliph’s face (expressed in his regnal

title, which describes him as drawing radiance from God),⁹⁵ and also composed a book on the virtues and deeds of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, supposedly the very incarnation of the egalitarian and populist party among the *ʿulamā*.⁹⁶ Clearly, when Muslim divines spoke about the equality of Muslims, they could have meant no more and no less than what would have been intended by Christian priests, monks, bishops, popes, and kings when they spoke of brotherhood in Christ.

The question of unlicensed preaching is only the tip of the iceberg of unexplored areas of social history of religion in the Muslim classical period and in the Muslim middle ages. One unexplored area of special pertinence is the degrees, modalities, and social and political settings of religious observance and personal behavior. It is not uncommonly asserted, and this is clearly and continuously reiterated in the books under discussion, that Muslims were and are obsessed with piety. The picture of society that emerges in works of law and other literature written by the *ʿulamā* tend to construe society, prescriptively rather than descriptively, as being determinedly and almost exclusively religious, and regulated by the *sharīʿa*, such that “the burden of social obligations that a medieval Muslim had to bear for the sake of general welfare and public propriety far exceeds anything imaginable to a modern Westerner” (p. 184). But this is apologetic self-representation of and special pleading by the *ʿulamā*, not social history.

Quite apart from the fact that such a burden is equally attributable to other communities, including substantial Christian communities today who would presumably count among Crone’s “western readers,” the point made is never demonstrated with reference to social history, and is in the nature of an *a priori* presumption: any study of medieval compendia of legal rescripts and responsa (*fatwā*), of medieval contemporary history, of books of market inspection (*hisba*), and any attempt to look into the actual competence and reach of the central and formal legal institution in an age of difficult communication and difficult central control, or of the complex relations between local customs and bookish regulations, would alert the reader to the fact that things could not conceivably have been as claimed, and that the social history of religion is, to say the least, exceedingly complex and should be approached with very scrupulous care.⁹⁷

If one were at this juncture again to join Crone in her appreciation of Islamic political thought, to behold the spectacle of her caravan, and to note with her that autocephalic people banding together in this way necessarily required guidance (p. 21), and if the caravaneer be the “scholar,” then one would find paradoxically that the main disciplining

instrument at the disposal of this caraveneer is a notion of communalist nomocracy, dispersed among Muslims, the prerogative of no-one. Implicitly following a model of arid Judaic legalism, which spread with deleterious analytical and scholarly consequences from highly influential earlier notions by Schleiermacher and Wellhausen⁹⁸ and habitually, almost by somatic reflex, generalized to Islam, this nomocratic order, sometimes referred to in the literature as orthopraxy, is generally called the *sharīʿa* of which the *ʿulamā*, in this conception, would be not so much the movers or the agents as the vehicles of its demotic and autarchic self-regulation. Given the simplicity ascribed to this “Islamic post-tribal” situation, this *sharīʿa*, “sealed in the past,” can only be an all-purpose comprehensive codified “constitution” (pp. 281 ff.) to which adherence must in the very nature of things be blind.

II.4: Nomocratic desires

Crone is clearly aware of the differences that exist between various positions within Sunni Islam towards the literalist position in theology (p. 219), generally rejected by Muslim theologians and, one would also hope, of the great complexity of Muslim theology. It is regrettable, however, that awareness of this does not appear to extend to the internal complexity and diversity of Muslim law itself, or to the only tangential—as distinct from imputations of a direct—relation between theology and law; the one is thematically and socially irreducible to the other. This awareness of complexity remains unfortunately inactive in her overall argument, and the author gives preference to the assertion that all one needed from religion was the minimal knowledge contained in old wives’ religiosity, the religiosity of the goodly but despised rustics, *idiotês* or *idiota* to antique and medieval European letters,⁹⁹ an attitude to religious doctrine occasionally praised by some Muslim theologians hankering after peace and uniformity in moments of desperation with the intensity, fractiousness, and unruliness of theological disputes, just as some Fathers of the Church tended towards favoring apophatic theology and stressed the primacy of devotional practice in the face of endemic dialectical disputes.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, some jurists and divines, like al-Juwainī (d. 1085), al-Ghazālī’s teacher who is also much quoted by Crone, or Ibn Bābawayh (d. 991) for the Shīʿa a century earlier, did write handbooks of basic devotions and dogmas to guide the perplexed in conditions where there was no central control and no correlative juridical system in regular operation. But such works in themselves presupposed that the demos was, on its own,

incapable of self-regulation or of correct belief. There were even juristic debates about the very legality of holding congregational Friday prayers without the authorization of the Caliphate.¹⁰¹

These considerations are important for assessing the twin presumptions of internal homogeneity and of self-enclosure that undergird Crone's notion of *sharī'a* to be examined in the paragraphs to follow. On these presumptions, crucial matters for Islamic political thought are summarily dismissed. One of these is the question of non-*sharīst* regimes that nevertheless assure the proper workings of human sociality, the lack of salvific prospects notwithstanding, as regarded in Muslim thinking about politics, and a topic which contains much material for theories of political order. What might plausibly be described as a conception of natural law obeyed by human societies not blessed by a divine dispensation is said to be absent. But such a notion of a human condition of innately regulated dispensation innocent of revelation [*barā'a asliyya, fītra*], indistinct in outline and substance but nevertheless implied as a concept, and consonant with the ideal of divine accommodation in history, was clearly there, and quite properly said to be outside the boundaries of legal discourse.¹⁰² It bears some comparison traditions of Stoic natural law (and to some extent Old Testament pseudo-epigraphical and later Talmudic references of an unwritten law) concerning the regulation of human societies before revelation, perhaps most famously expressed in St. Paul's reference (Rom., 2:12–5) to period *ante legem* when a dispensation natural to humanmankind was inscribed in the *syneidesis*.¹⁰³ Indeed such a notion developed a variety of discussions pertaining to the general theory of legal purpose, especially in works of jurisprudence, *usūl al-fiqh*, and including most coherently al-Ghazālī's *Mustasfā*, Averroes' (d. 1198) commentaries on Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and al-Shātibī's (d. 1388) *Muwāfaqāt*. It is implicit in the ubiquitous discussions of rational politics (*siyāsa 'aqliyya*) as most decidedly distinct at once from the religious and the tyrannical, of which the best-known is that of Ibn Khaldūn. When Crone does mention such matters, this occurs as afterthoughts (p. 268), without having an influence on the construction of her arguments, as we have seen before in other regards. It is particularly to be regretted that the systematic elaborations of the almost naturalistic notions of human interest and of *ratio legis* underlying human legislation in general, and the connections between theodicy and legal order defined by *maqāsid* or the general theory of *ratio legis*, perhaps most elaborately developed by al-Ghazālī and even more systematically by al-Shātibī (of whom not a single mention is made in the book, but

he belongs to a period after Crone's cut-off point), remain outside the range of what Crone adjudges relevant in this regard.

By way of amplifying the remit of aversion to everything non-*shar'ist* and "non-Muslim" she attributes to Muslims, Crone unfortunately resorts to rhetorical arguments for the obsessive introversion of Muslims—without qualification—in common currency, and reiterates as a case in point claims made by certain modern authors that "Muslims" were incurious about non-Muslim lands and took no note of the fact that China, for instance, was a sophisticated society. Such assertions are made despite the fact that medieval Arabic writings on China are replete with praise for and wonderment at the mercurial talents of her people, but more importantly for the efficiency and justice of her administration, to the point where she appears almost as an utopian society.¹⁰⁴ But more important, Arabic philosophy, fairly competently if selectively paraphrased in the relevant sections, is yet set at a distance, as not having been sufficiently Islamic,¹⁰⁵ although Crone mercifully feels it is necessary to disassociate herself from the interpretations of Leo Strauss and his followers (pp. 174–5 and n. 37). This setting apart serves equally to highlight the division between what is "authentically" Muslim and what is not. In a way, al-Fārābī (d. 950) seems to be disqualified from inclusion in Muslim political thought on account of having learnt philosophy from Christians who, contrary to what we know about most of them and about the great philosopher himself, are said to have "worked on the margins of high society" (p. 188). Nevertheless, al-Fārābī is quite correctly regarded as having worked in terms of important themes pertaining to Hellenistic theories of kingship (pp. 193 ff.). Yet no appreciation is evident of the salience of this theme, central, as has been suggested many times above, to Islamic political thought philosophical and otherwise, nor are appropriate conclusions, connections and comparisons drawn.¹⁰⁶

These and other matters are declared extraneous to *sharī'a*, and therefore of little relevance to Islamic political thought. They are to be assessed, according to the works under discussion, by the *sharī'a*'s simple functions of inclusion into the autocephalic community and exclusion from it, and to be, on behalf of medieval Muslim thinkers, accepted as valid or rejected in so far as they did or did not relate to the *sharī'a*'s alleged status as "a moral order" (pp. 286–7) defining "the moral status of acts in the eyes of God" (p. 9). Quite apart from the fact that Allah is not a moralist but an exacting and sometimes capricious yet compassionate judge and taskmaster, it is important to note that the presumption that the *sharī'a* is a moral code is a very

common misconception which plays an important role in defining Islamic political thought as conceived in the works under discussion.

The *sharī`a* is in fact not so much a code of law as a general title for good order and an ideological sign, like *nomos* or *dharma*, and neither of the authors of the books under discussion has gone beyond the ideological use of the term made by medieval sources and modern neo-traditionalism to look into the precise uses and possible senses in which it is used. *Sharī`a* is a term best avoided in concrete historical discussions, where attention needs to be directed to concrete expressions of it: namely, in Muslim jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which is very much unlike a code. It is rather a corpus of precedents, many of them contradictory but all equally valid under the principle of consensus, and a body of hermeneutical procedures for interpreting both precedent and canon. It is clear that attributing to this the character of a code is meant not to describe or inform, but rather rhetorically to suggest Levitical precision, definitiveness, and immobility, all of which features are out of keeping with historical reality and which are indeed anachronistic.

As for morality, Crone's argument under review, which is quite common in Islamic studies scholarship but not among Muslim divines, and for which there is little evidence in the classical sources, tends to gloss over the problems presented by considering the relationship between law and morality in any legal or social setting, in none of which is there a uniform pattern, let alone a correspondence between the two. It appears, moreover, that the insistence that *sharī`a* be a moral code is a topos used to connote—but neither to describe nor to illustrate—the communitarian and acephalous model of "Islamic society," a ubiquitous caravan uniform over time and space, in which social practice is construed as conforming to law, and in which law is presumed to emanate from uniform "Muslim" social practice, the two arising out of a religion which is the sum-total of social life, and which fashions society as no more nor less than a congregation. The social and institutional modalities of legal precepts, institutions, and practices, their geographical and social reach, their relation to custom and to *mazālim* courts run directly by political authorities, and collateral matters including, most crucially, the political, institutional, and ideological relationship between the legal system and the state, and the complex interrelations between morality, law and religion: all these need to be studied in historical terms rather than as archetypes passing for ideal types, and studied historically rather than solicited through ideological statements which might convey the impression of a utopian order.¹⁰⁷

Rather than being a moral code or a set of moral precepts, the *sharīʿa* as concretely expressed in jurisprudence is a technical repertoire of law, though this did in many instances, in medieval Muslim history and in other histories as well, have moral and social force whose incidence and mechanisms must be scanned historically rather than be taken for granted as *a priori* assumptions. According to Muslim jurisprudence, words and meanings cannot, after all, be solicited entirely from the lexicon, for both can be linguistic-lexical, conventional, or technical-legal.¹⁰⁸ Works of Muslim jurisprudence often open with an elaborate discussion of the nature of technical vocabularies, meant to disallow the terms used in jurisprudence from being used in a common-sense way, and it might legitimately be surmised that one reason scholarship has not frequently enough addressed the distinction between law and morality properly but rather identified the two, is the lack of technical expertise and of patience to read through treatises of law and legal method—it is curious that the very substantive advances in scholarship on classical Muslim law produced in the past two decades, which gives no credence to the image in common currency, is not often enough noted, as if with a will to denial.

In the eyes of jurisprudence, including Muslim jurisprudence, acts may be adjudged legal, yet be in themselves immoral, and the task of lawyers, professionals of metic intelligence, was to translate *norma normans*, considered in strictly legalistic terms, into *norma normata*, which mediates legalism and practical legality. Casuistical means of getting around the prohibition of interest, for instance, were perfectly legal, and marital repudiation, which may be unfair and immoral, and is indeed generally classified by legists as reprehensible (*makrūh*), is nevertheless in its turn perfectly legal. Muslim divines in the Middle Ages, like lawyers everywhere, were well aware of the distinction between morality and legality.¹⁰⁹ As practical lawyers and casuists, Muslim divines did not conflate legality with righteousness, and worked by discrimination, not by generalization in the manner of moral philosophers overall.

For their part, morality and ethics were discussed in a variety of medieval Arabic literary genres, including philosophy, sententious literature and biography, which are of decided relevance to political thought. But they form no part of legal literature, where the criteria of judgement are technical rather than moral. They do form an important component in *Fürstenspiegel*, where they are treated in a fashion neither homiletic nor legalistic, but rather utilitarian, occasionally with a breath of philosophical ethics but altogether as a component in the art

of politics, of human husbandry.¹¹⁰ *Fürstenspiegel* authored by later *`ulamā* did enjoin rulers to take the counsel from the *`ulamā*, and reminded them of their mortality and their duties to God, but they did not conflate *fiqh* with morality.

This simplification of Muslim law, both as to its structure and nature as a legal corpus and as social practice, the former simple, closed, and conclusive and the latter a simple matter of blind adherence, is clearly crucial to the image of the “Islamic post-tribal” caravan and all-purpose community as described. The denial of history—and claims for the prodigious stability of Muslim law over time¹¹¹—lends meta-historical stability and coherence to this presumed community, and lends a certain glib cogency to its discursive redaction, in legal, political and other writing. Crone sees Islamic political thought not as concerned with matters proper to political thought, but as arising from an introverted concern with self-regulation and fidelity to origins, at a distance from ruling instances. It therefore comes naturally to her to write of the functions and duties of government in Islamic political thought exclusively in terms of restrictive monocratic prescriptions arising from the *sharī`a* or the absence of such prescriptions.

The specific division of governmental functions between those which are shar`ist and those that are not is almost entirely Crone's. Her account of them (ch. 18) is purely enumerative, and involves neither conceptual nor historical analysis, nor does it look into the important matter of the sacralisation of the public order that takes place in the genre of *siyāsa shar`iyya*, where it properly belongs.¹¹² Not much use is made in Crone's discussion of manuals and other works of Muslim law (*fiqh*), nor indeed of al-Māwardī's systematic discussion of these matters. It is very odd that a book which makes so much of Islamic law should refer hardly at all to legal literature, to manuals and collections of *fiqh* or to the very important theoretical literature on the principles of jurisprudence. Crone's discussion amounts to a combination of prescriptive statements trawled from sundry sources, and anecdotal accounts of certain practices randomly assembled from historical works. The reader is given no sense of the connections between topics discussed, and what their aggregate might imply for conceptions of government overall—except to feed the dualism of shar`ist/non-shar`ist, authentic/inauthentic, Islamic/un-Islamic.

Among shar`ist functions discussed by Crone are the validation of the community, the execution of law, *jihād* (a good discussion on pp. 369 ff., rebutting many stereotyped conceptions<sup>113</sup>), *al-amr bi'l ma'rūf wa'l-nahy `an al-munkar* (commanding righteousness and forbidding

iniquity), the preservation of religion, and certain fiscal services: in short matters that are of concern to sharʿism as defined by the author, though we have no explanation as to why fiscal services for instance are included here or in the original sources. Commanding rightousness and forbidding iniquity is only rarely mentioned in legal works, and the issue appears more frequently as a topic in theological or homiletic works. Discussions of this theme concentrate on the more concrete and manageable functions of the institution of *hisba* with its *muhtasib*, fulfilling some of the same urban functions as the Roman *aedil* (*agora-nomos*),¹¹⁴ and appointed by the state, and has a long history in the Middle East—in second-century Palmyra, for instance, this office holder had been designated by the Middle Aramaic *rb swq*,¹¹⁵ which is cognate with the Arabic *sāhib al-sūq*. That “commanding rightousness and forbidding iniquity” finds its place in this discussion of Crone’s is likely to be connected rather with the author’s vision of autarchic communitarianism, in which public prerogatives devolve to the demos, to such an extent that she can state, with little justification, that it was meritorious “or even obligatory for private citizens to take the duty of enforcing public morality upon themselves” (p. 301).

Historical works are replete with accounts of the bad ends to which many such persons came, and there is no evidence that they were so plentiful as to constitute a distinct social practice at any stage in the history of Muslims. The performance of such acts is in stereotypical fashion attributed to the rare persons who founded states or movements of revivalism (such as Ibn Tūmart [d. 1130], founder of the Almohad Empire in North Africa and Spain). The difference is that the former unfortunates acted quite often in the informal and habitual ways of public vigilantism in moments of disorder and anomie, an extraordinary circumstance given that social control was generally exercised in the standard way common to all societies, by social relations and conventions, personal example, and police action. In any case, Traditions about enjoining the rightousness and forbidding iniquity are meant for what in contemporary terms might be called pietist self-awareness. But being the work of practical men, such traditions were always glossed with an eye to the public interest. Such traditions indeed generally call on the vast majority of people to act against iniquity not necessarily with their hands, nor necessarily with their tongues, but in their hearts; apart from exceptional cases (such as Wahhabism or Talibanism), the tradition in question incited the moderation of peaceable piety, not vigilantism and zealotry. Clearly, here as elsewhere in this and other books

under discussion, textual fragments are made to yield total social histories and comprehensive ethnological types.

But all this, over-dramatisation included, still does not satisfy the inquiry into what relation sharʿist duties might entertain with public authorities and with topics proper to political thought. Yet Islamic political thought cannot be legitimately conceived without them. Without inquiring into this relationship, what we will have is inevitably an arbitrary miscellany, as in ch. 18 of Crone's book, where "internal security" and charity, axial functions of government in Islamic political thought, including the Muslim juristic theory of the Caliphate propounded by al-Māwardī, are for no apparent reason pronounced to be non-sharʿist, and are lumped together with the provision of medical services, the construction of roads and other infrastructure, education and culture, containing potted information on this or that aspect of these topics, all of them important for social and institutional history, and for the public/private interface of philanthropy and public work, but not to political thought. Public order is a prime component of Islamic political thought, juristic and otherwise, and cannot be dismissed as being merely a desideratum of "non-legal literature" (p. 305).

II. 5. The spectral caliphate

Having discussed the notion of autarchic, acephalic communalism and its supposed legal and other manifestations, we must continue following Crone's categorical assumptions. The sharʿist community is said to have existed in fact, with historical predominance, even in capital cities and metropolises far removed from the Kharijites and the Zaydis, though the latter are incongruously also seen as its only remaining repositories. But this was also a world of make-believe. The Abbasid empire, the erstwhile repository of legitimacy, no matter how dubious to Crone's presumed actors and in her own estimation, is said to have come to an "effective end" in 861 (p. 88). With the empire no longer one vast all-purpose community incongruously modeled on a small tribal unit, Muslims had to "cope with a fragmented world," but without as much as a glance beyond the facts of political fragmentation to the idea of an ecumenical empire which the Abbasids embodied, despite myriad troubles, for nearly 400 years after 861.

The story starts with the "end of simplicity," which came with the arrival of the Abbasids (p. 32): this was when Caliphs were, according to Crone and against evidence, no longer vehicles of collective salvation or continuators of soteriological genealogy, but merely guardians

of the community, thus becoming quasi-caliphs, unlike their Umayyad predecessors, the picture of whom as it appears here often lacks coherence and conviction (p. 30). The Caliphate is said to have henceforth become "a surrogate institution." A surrogate institution being better than none, the disconsolate Sunni hierocracy, their supposed antipathy to the state notwithstanding, therefore opted for a discourse on the Caliphate that was like an insurance policy "without the small print," consisting of rules without qualifications, "even though the qualifications are sometimes such as to undermine the rules altogether" (p. 224).

Of course framing the Sunni legal theory of the Caliphate in this way eradicates altogether the imprint of history, and simultaneously substitutes the small print of quotations from here and there for the overall theory of the Caliphate: this theory is embedded in a conception of power, order and authority, in the context of which legal theory is a specific technical elaboration. And the small print of actual history consists in the practices and theories of the supreme office that cannot with any justice be confined to works of doxography, heresiography, and theology, the mainsprings of Crone's discussion. The small print of legal treatises on the Caliphate, so important for Crone's topic, demonstrate moreover and quite unambiguously that these treatises consist, not of prescriptive and idealizing maxims and requirements animated by a complaisant attitude of piety, but rather of technical legal discourse which has little to do with communalist moralism, and which consisted largely of "small print."¹¹⁶

The most salient case in point of this technical discourse is the most representative and influential treatise of the Caliphal counselor, diplomat, jurist and judge al-Māwardī (d. 1054). He takes up the various prerogatives and functions of the supreme office, in a manner that integrates both shar'ist sources of public authority, such as interpretations of the Muslim canon, and previous Abbasid practice in areas such as war and peace, the delegation of authority and public order. It is clearly incorrect to claim that the Caliphate had not been previously covered in legal handbooks: the Caliphate in general had not been so covered, being preserved in Palatine institutes, in the administration, in works of history and belles-lettres, in works on politics. Yet many aspects of its functions had been the subject of juristic elaboration, such as finance and taxation as treated in *Kitāb al-Amwāl* of Abū Yūsuf (d. 798) some three centuries before al-Māwardī. These topics were in both cases presented, not as "constitutional law" (pp. 222 ff.) but in the manner usual in works of jurisprudence: as a repertoire of texts, precedents and practices relating to the thematic cluster that makes up the

juristic topic of the Caliphate, from which the sovereign might choose according to the small print of circumstances and according to his appreciation of the public interest. The public interest here is not that of an acephalic "Islamic post-tribal" community, but of the `Abbāsīd state and its subjects, a universal Muslim empire working towards both worldly order and salvation.

What al-Māwardī did was not to try and "preserve" the "constitution" (p. 223), which did not in fact exist. What al-Māwardī accomplished in effect was to draw up a systematic legal repertoire of possible procedures for discharging the duties of the Caliphate, to state comprehensively the legal aspects of public authority in systematic compass. The structure and purpose of his oft-quoted *al-Ahkām al-sultāniyya* (it never ceases to amaze me to note that most discussions of al-Māwardī's legal elaboration of the Caliphate give the impression that his admittedly dry *Ahkām*, on certain passages from which most discussions of his political thought are usually based, had not actually been read right through, and that it is unusual to find reference to his legal compendium or his Koranic exegesis) is that of a technical legal treatise. In line with genre-specific properties, to each topic treated (for example: taxation, non-Muslims, manumission, the fisc, public charity, and the delegation of authority) a number of different options, interpretations, and former practices and preferences are cited, and a number of analogies are made with a variety contractual and other legal transactional forms. The final decision devolved to the Caliph, here acting in his capacity as the head of the legal institution. Muslim jurisprudence has generally the character of judges' law.¹¹⁷

The *Ahkām* was moreover written under circumstances when the worst was about to be over for the Caliphate, and when it was about to embark upon renewing itself, benefiting from long historical experience, taking stock of Abbasid practice and of legal arrangements available, after two centuries of serious disturbance and varying degrees of military and political disempowerment. It was unsurprising that this was a time when the Caliphate continued and indeed intensified the ceremonial and literary expression of the lofty and sacral and sometimes soteriological aspects that it has always had. These last are given very little or no attention in the books under discussion, most likely reflecting an aversion to non-theological and non-homiletic works, and reflecting their "un-Islamic" origin in the civilian rather than the priestly elite, though the priestly elite, including al-Māwardī, were more often than not fully complicit in this ecumenical and monarchical Caliphal ideology, and counted as members of court. After all, they were all

equally believers in an ecumenical Muslim empire, unthinkable without its supreme office. There is no justification for claiming that al-Māwardī's enterprise was *ab initio* doomed and that his "solution" was undermined by the Saljuqs (p. 234): historical developments speak to the contrary, and the claim makes no sense except as an *a priori* supposition dictated by the historiography of malediction that has already been reviewed.

Al-Māwardī was a contemporary of the last Buyids, for a century or so the overlords of Baghdad, and of the earliest phase of Saljuq dominion. That after a short initial period during which some Buyid princes behaved like callow parvenus, they preserved and at times indeed elevated the Caliphal office, no matter how symbolically, was not simply because, having been originally Condottieri, they were "used to keep their religious convictions private, so they allowed the `Abbasid Caliphate to continue" (p. 220). They were born and raised in an atmosphere of imperial ecumenism embodied by the Caliphal office wherein resided legitimacy, without which the world would have been inconceivable, and in the context of which their indistinct Shi'ism clearly seemed irrelevant. The vast majority of them purposefully nurtured and perpetuated the Caliphal office, for such continuity was not necessarily premised on Caliphal empowerment, but on ecumenical empowerment. Indeed, they did support the Caliphs "in return for legitimation," and this is precisely the point of importance, provided we understand by legitimation the conferment of legality within a technical system of law. The connection between legitimacy and legality parallels that between morality and law which has already been discussed. The Caliph was the ultimate arbiter of legality. The Buyids rooted themselves in imperial institutions, their private courts apart, which in any case calqued the administrative and other apparatuses of the supreme office. The Caliphs were not simply "high priests" in their pay, high priests who, Crone claims, contrary to evidence, no longer had religious authority (p. 222).

It was participation in imperial, ecumenical and Muslim legitimacy, drawing on the prodigious symbolic capital of Abbasid Caliphal imperialism that the Buyids (and the Saljuqs, as well as the distant Ghaznavids, Ayyubids, and others) sought, as did Serb and Bulgar princes with regard to Byzantium. This is why Crone's claim and that of Gibb and many others, that all this was just pusillanimous legalistic genuflection is quite beside the point. The famous *imārtat al-istilā'* of Al-Māwardī, often highlighted, whereby overpowering princes were mandated by the Caliph with a multiplicity of Caliphal duties and prerogatives, was in

technical juristic terms in line with a variety of previous Abbasid precedents, including the office of the Vizirate, and not the work of craven jurists in the service of desperately solicitous Caliphs keen merely to cultivate a charade. Its legal basis was the juristic notion of delegation and representation common in legal transactions, which varied between the delegation of very specific tasks to delegation of much broader sweep. The Caliph decided the extent to which his authority and functions were to be delegated in light of circumstances (including circumstances of his impuissance), and broadly-conceived delegations of authority resulted not only from diminished Caliphal circumstances, but also from decisions of earlier, strong and very effective Caliphs, such as al-Ma'mūn during the Vizirate of al-Faḍl b. Sahl. Whatever the extent to which the Caliphate at certain points in its very long history was a shadow of earlier moments of glory, this shadow still remained the shadow of God on earth.

It was, for Crone, just brute force, in the form of kingship, that became predominant at the end of the period she covers. She vastly overstates the "illegitimacy" of sultans and, as we have seen, vastly exaggerates and over-dramatises the importance, salience and consistency of the negligible few who sustained such a position (pp. 45 ff.). She consequently inclines to the view that kingship reared its unseemly head, and came into its own, only towards the end of the period in association with the waning of religion (pp. 153 f.). She finds in the *Fürstenspiegel*—which like Black she dates too late, and regards with no good reason as being "overwhelmingly" communitarian (p. 152), thus excluding, among other things, the very early works of Ibn al-Muqaffa' and `Abd al-Hamīd b. Yahyā al-Kātib (d. 750), and texts such as *`Ahd Ardashir*, all much earlier than the eleventh century, not counting later works—a sacralization of kingship, and concludes that "to early Muslims, kings were usurpers of God's power. To later Muslims, by contrast, they typified it" (p. 164). There is no justification in history for such a conclusion, quite apart from the question of which "Muslims" are indicated here; both Caliphs and sultans were conceived generically according to conceptions of monarchy divinely sanctioned.

In point of fact, there was no "return" in later Muslim kingship to "local Persian traditions" like Zoroastrianism, Neo-Platonism, and Gnosticism (p. 164). This position can only be maintained if one were to suppose that, after the passage of five centuries of Muslim rule, Islamic traditions remained foreign to Persia, and that traditions in place since the seventh century remained unchanged. The fact is that

we know earlier Persian political writings only from later and reworked versions in Arabic, not from their Pahlavi originals. The Caliphs were almost from the very beginning conceived in the Hellenistic mould of sacral kingship, unsurprising as Islam, as suggested, is a product of history as well as of geography, the history and geography of Late Antiquity in the Near East, and not a product of the early polity of Muhammad's Arabia, except in so far as this last is presented as a genealogical charter. This, like all genealogical charters, is governed by telescoping and by interpolation, and performs a socio-cultural function more closely connected with the positional logic of the moment it obeys, conveying political configurations of the moment of conception and of writing rather than yielding ethnogenetic scholarship.

Crone does mention, almost as an afterthought, that late antique notions were active in the early claim by the Umayyads to sacral office, without any sense of incongruity, as they were far more "tribal" and "Arabian" than their successors, and would not therefore, according to the interpretative themes of this book, be expected to be so sullied. Nevertheless, it is maintained that these claims were ostensibly severed with the coming of the Abbasids and compromised by her assumption, unfounded as we saw, that the *'ulamā* thenceforth became the central social fact. Crone's discussion of the Umayyads is somewhat ambiguous and in part uncertain, portraying them as at once the end of early Muhammadan religious charisma and as continuators of Late Antique royalism, and allowing them no legacy to later political thinking. This displays a characteristic reluctance to see the two—Muhammadan charisma along dynastic lines and Late Antique monarchism—as confluent and indeed correlative, which is a crucial matter for understanding Islamic political thought. Like the Umayyads, the 'Abbasids continued until the very end to be God's direct deputies and appointees, and Muhammad's legatees and kinsmen as well (p. 195 and 195, n. 113). That some *'ulamā* objected to this mattered little, and cannot legitimately be made into the centre-piece of "Islamic political thought." Similarly, that the Pope is not St. Peter but his vicar does not prevent the former from carrying the keys to Heaven, nor does the fact that an icon is a mere figure diminish its magical effectiveness.

For a proper appreciation of the history of Islamic political thought, a major shift of perspective is required, one in which it matters little conceptually whether the supreme political instance is occupied by a king or by a caliph: the two were grafted one upon the other as to their monarchical descriptions, prerogatives, epithets, and functions. Indeed, the Caliphate was a technical juristic specification within the generic

instance of monarchy, adding to it a genealogy of blood, of kinship with the prophet, and the charisma of his apostolate. A technical specification is precisely what is explicitly offered: at the very beginning of his *Ahkām*, al-Māwardī mentions briefly the rational justification of monarchy, which we have seen to be grounded in the crooked timber of humanity and the resultant problem of order and its maintenance, that can only be assured by overpowering authority. But he says that for his purpose, for the purpose of a legal treatise, these considerations are irrelevant, as legal institutes are derived from distinctive sources using particular procedural rules building upon Traditions, not least because the *imām* has to fulfil certain obligations of a devotional nature which might not in themselves be called for rationally.¹¹⁸ By the same token, we find that salvation-historical arguments are absent from this account, except in so far as there is reference to Muhammad's prophecy. Such irrelevance is genre-specific: the purely rational, anthropological argument is not untrue, nor incorrect, certainly not false or otherwise irrelevant, but its place is not in legal treatises, but in other genres, like advice literature, to which Al-Māwardī himself contributed. The imperative of monarchy is an a priori ground for order in the world overall. The specification of the Caliphal form of monarchy in terms of Muslim jurisprudence is a technical one, albeit the ground for the best of all possible worlds.

Concluding remarks

In brief conclusion, it may be said that if the study of Islamic political thought were to be pursued according to a way that is recognizably historical, and in order for it to be appropriate to the frame of historical inquiry, historical material pertaining to it needs to be configured, in its emphases, in a manner corresponding to what the present state of historical knowledge and historical method require and allow. Otherwise the history of political conceptions under the Muslim empires would remain largely the *terra obscura* that we gather from the books under discussion. We have seen how certain matters are amplified beyond measure in order to fit a preconceived pattern and narrative of rise and decline, how marginal matters are over-interpreted, how central matters are registered as afterthoughts and under-interpreted, and how the history of Islamic political thought and of its central concepts are construed in a manner so contra-factual, improbable and tendentious as to constitute major distortions and to produce an image unrec-

ognizable to the frame of history, and resistant to the basic requirements of historical scholarship. That the books discussed above are meant to be textbooks, and that textbooks are meant to simplify, is something quite other than making them the occasion for uncritically and unreflectively restating and perpetuating an old *doxa*.

We have seen how claims for exceptionalism are used to justify an egregious disregard to both the normal equipment of the historical science and the usual workings of human societies, and the insistence instead on a predictable, well-defined, stable *homo islamicus*, who may surprise, but must be prevented from speaking in any tongue but that of the shibboleth, as heard by a strand of the scholarly tradition of Islamic Studies recalling times past. "Islam" becomes a denominative category which runs amok, calling up common clichés with which to fill itself. In this way, a paradigmatic grid of misapprehension, sometimes almost willful, is perpetuated in textbook form, and will if effectively reproduce an abiding conceptual malformation as described in the above pages.

It has been suggested that this state of affairs with the current historiography of Islamic political thought is a function of over-patterning, of the primacy of clichés and stereotypes, untempered by an undeniable measure of historical knowledge. As a consequence, I should suggest that in redressing the situation historical scholarship needs to go beyond the name of Islam taken as a grid of historical categorization and a means of historical explanation. "Islam" appears in the literature surveyed as a categorical fallacy, as a vast error of historical categorization, and must be decomposed to other categories amenable to historical treatment. One could then avoid skewed emphases, repetitive clichés, and missed opportunities for proper historical narrative and interpretation afforded by the sources, and disallowed, as we have seen, by being simply ignored.

Above all, for the study of Islamic political conceptions to go forward, I hope that it is clear from the above that it would need properly to define its subject-matter and the topics crucial for its understanding, and not to rest content with facile recourse to the paraphrase and the common cliché, as can only result when attempts are not made to go beyond the smoke-screen of the medieval sources. And these topics would need to be integrated within the broader historical swell that gave rise to them and beyond divisions of East and West, Christendom and Islam—beyond an ideological and culturalist historiography which conjures up historical entities by naming them. In this connection, this broad historical swell is that of Near Eastern, Hellenistic and Late

Antique conceptions of monotheistic monarchy as inflected by ecumenical imperialism and wedded to Muslim genealogies—the double genealogy of the Caliphate, at once directly connected to divine dispensation, and to Muhammad’s dispensation, figuring at once as charisma, legal order, and blood relation, but also inserted in a universal history of salvation.

Clearly, an appropriate starting point here might be the imaginative, innovative and erudite scholarship spawned in recent decades by studies of Late Antiquity, which has brought under critical scrutiny most of the commonplaces concerning late Rome and Byzantium, and early medieval Europe as well, and opened the way to a reconsideration of periodization in terms of a very fruitful comparativism, beyond the conjuration of labels and dewy-eyed classicism.

Appendix

As stated in n. 4, there are a number of errors in the books by Crone and Black discussed in this article, some of them not insubstantial. For the benefit of subsequent impressions, I will take up the most significant of these:

Crone: p. 37 and *passim*: it is surely misleading to describe *shūrā* as an elective procedure except in the vaguest of terms. It indicates a secular political function resulting in the investiture of an individual, by a duly constituted body (*ahl al-hall wa'l-'aqd, potestas ligandi et solvendi*), with a particular office under determinate political circumstances and which might operate electively, consensually, or again as the de jure ratification of a de facto appointment—the resultant *bay'a* (and this was not always preceded by *shūrā*) is an act of recognition, acclamation, and confirmation, not of nomination or election; p. 76: it would seem to be quite unsafe albeit not implausible, to claim that the Caliph Sulaymān’s wish to conquer Constantinople was connected with the association, in a Tradition attributed to Muhammad (*hadīth*), of the figure of the Messiah with the conquest of the Byzantine capital, by referring to a *hadīth* that occurs in *Kitāb al-Fitan* of Nu`aym Ibn Hammād, written between 833 and 835, and without ascertaining if this particular Tradition had indeed been in existence during the lifetime of Sulaymān, who died in 717; p. 77: it is illegitimate to claim that virtually all post-Umayyad messianism was Shi`ite; Sunnis did produce over centuries a substantial corpus of messianic writing, predominantly quietist, often but not exclusively in the mode of *vaticinium ex eventu*, but also associated with activist messianic movements and especially in North Africa and Spain; p. 80: translating the appellation of the Shi`ite Messiah “al-Qā'im” as “the standing one” is perhaps mildly diverting but clearly wrong. The word “al-Qā'im” is not here a substantive, for the name of the messianic figure “al-Qā'im” is an ellipsis. The full title is “al-Imām al-Qā'im bi'l-Haqq” and sometimes “Qā'im 'Al

Muhammad” or “al-Qā’im min ‘Āl Muhammad.” It is rather a *nomen agentis* in the form of an active participle. The verb “qāma” means “to rise to something,” “to act upon something,” “to uphold something,” when used as a transitive verb followed by the prepositions “bi” or “alā,” rather than to “get up” or to “stand.” The former is the case here, where “al-Qā’im” designates the messianic figure arisen to uphold righteousness; p. 131: translating “*al-Mihna*” as “inquisition,” common as it is (and previously adopted by the present author), is misleading, as it would, if taken seriously, attribute to the *Mihna* of al-Ma’mūn or the less known *Mihna* of al-Qādir, or to the *imtihān* of individuals in between or subsequently, the technical, procedural, political and administrative means and aims which were absent from these events. The *Mihna* is more appropriately comparable to Roman and Byzantine persecutions than to the Catholic Inquisition, and the procedures used during the *mihna* over the createdness of the Koran and those by iconoclast emperors (especially in the second iconoclastic period, roughly contemporary with the *mihna*) were very similar; p. 172: asserting that neo-Platonists were prone to envisage ultimate knowledge as “mystical union” is misleading and inaccurate, for neo-Platonist knowledge is conveyed, not in terms of *wahda* appropriate for mystical union and implying a consubstantialist theolepsis, but rather of complex forms of mimesis (*muhākāt*), the relationship with the Active Intelligence being expressed by the standard Arabic term *ittisāl*, mimetic communion, in which the Active Intelligence becomes present to its mortal receiver who is thereby transfigured by contemplation, in a manner conveyed by the ocular metaphor of an imprint (*irtisām* and its cognates)—the fate of the soul after death is another matter, but it does not in any case merge with God in the neo-Platonic scheme of things; p. 230: even the most rapid reading of any compendium of classical Muslim law (or indeed Māwardī’s *Ahkām*, quoted in this book), under the heading of *hirāba*, sedition, would reveal that this category covers indifferently political and criminal acts, rebellion and highway robbery, for which penalties are uncommonly severe and unforgiving, and it is therefore quite incorrect to claim that Sunnis called for sparing rebels in the name of communal cohesion; p. 235: it would be misleading to reduce the term *wara`* to “scrupulous observance of the law”: it rather conveys the sense of “piety,” which usually but not universally implied punctilious ritual observance, and lexically conveys the sense of fearful veneration and reverence; p. 263: “*barā’a asliyya*” is clearly not “fundamental non-obligation,” but rather has the standard meaning of “primal dispensation.” The verb “*barā’a*” means to create, God is often called al-Bārī’, the demiurge, a *barā’a* is an order or a command; in modern Arabic, the word is used for certain legal documents such as patents and formal attestations, but have preserved some of their earlier senses—thus, for instance, a *barā’a bābawiyya* is a Papal Bull. “*Barā’a asliyya*” is cognate with another important and highly complex term used in Muslim literature, *al-fitra*, connoting a primal guiltlessness, albeit not one that is free or unstructured, rather one that is regulated by a primeval notion of order which Islam repeats. The other meaning of *barā’a*, as release from a certain obligation, is inappropriate here; p. 381: “*taklīf*” is not “moral responsibility,” but is rather a technical juristic term for legal responsibility consequent upon majority; p. 398: to maintain that the nineteenth century Ottoman *Mecelle* was an

entire civil code generated by customary law accumulated over some centuries is quite wrong, for it was rather a pruned and codified version of certain areas of the classical Hanafi law of commercial transactions.

Black: I will list some of the most obvious errors (some, which may or may not be typographical, have been excluded), which, one would have expected, would have been discerned by his publishers' reviewers, copy-editors and proof-readers, in the hope that this might again help with the preparation of possible further editions of the book: p. 51: the princely title Yamīn al-Dawla does not mean "destined to rule," but "the right hand of the realm"; p. 55: Iranian monarchical traditions in Muslim domains were not, as suggested, post-Abbasid, but coeval with the Arab Caliphate; p. 58: Islamic philosophy was not, as suggested, "bounded" by Islamic beliefs, though it did engage them in a variety of sometimes contradictory ways; p. 82: "al-`amma" is not "the generality," but rather the commoners, the uninitiated the *vulgus*, the rabble, the great unwashed; p. 83: Ash`arist theology was more fideist than literalist, and was indeed strongly opposed to literalism; it does not bear comparison to Ibn Hazm; pp. 87: "tawhid" is "unification" or "profession of divine unicity" not "delegation": the latter is "tafwid"; p. 89: Māwardī's Caliphal deputy cannot be said never to have "happened," as the contrary is true; 90n9: works of Māwardī said to be unedited (according to a source now out of date) all appeared in the past few years and before the publication of Black's book; p. 90 n 12: Abū Ya`lā and Ibn al-Farrā' are one and the same person: Ibn al-Farrā' is this person's patronymic; p. 91: "al-dawla al-nizāmiyya" cannot be translated as "the destined reign," but rather as "the reign of Nizām al-Mulk"; p. 94: the princely title `Adud ad-Dawla does not mean "destined to reign" but "pillar of the realm"; p. 98: Sufi *gnosis* was not, as here asserted, available to the average person; p. 108: the suggestion that Fürstenspiegel date from after AD 1110 is incorrect, for this genre appeared in the eighth century; p. 110: "sayyids" are not "religious lords," but rather descendants of Muhammad when used in a terminological sense, otherwise quite simply, chieftains or masters; p. 129: the political significance of sufism did not, as suggested, lie in the doctrine of renunciation, and some Sufi movements were decidedly activist, sometimes with millennarian ideas and practices; p. 143: it is incorrect to say that when the *sharī'a* is ambiguous it was for the Sultan to decide; the custodians of interpretation were the *ulamā* in general and judges in particular; p. 146: "hukamā'" are not simply "wise men," but most often designate specifically philosophers and physicians; p. 162: Ibn al-Khatīb's advice to Pedro El Cruel to respect people's property is by no means singularly "Euro-Christian," but is a very common refrain pronounced before Sultans and Caliphs by their advisers; ch. 18: it is very unsafe to use Dawood's abridgement of Rosenthal's translation of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* as the primary source for studying this important figure; this abridgement further schematises an already unsound albeit standard translation, and two far more reliable translations (by de Slane in the nineteenth century and by Cheddadi very recently) are available in French; p. 169: Ibn Khaldūn did not, as suggested, reject philosophical views of prophecy, but rather made very extensive use of them, and indeed adopted Avicenna's theory wholesale; p. 172; p. 174: Ibn Khaldūn's "natural dominion" cannot be confused with his notion of "rational government"; Ibn Khaldūn regarded the former as savage,

tyrannical and destructive, unlike the latter; p. 199: the Ottoman state cannot be described as a religious polity except with very extensive caveats and specifications; p. 211: it would be quite anachronistic to describe the Safavid state as a "nation state," and not only because the Safavid dynasty and their entourage were of Turkic stock; p. 250: that some jurists under the Mughals stated that the *shari`a* should be interpreted in terms of the circumstances that gave rise to it is not "revolutionary," but is a very standard traditional component of koranic exegesis and juristic method overall, antedating the Mughals by more than eight centuries; p. 301: al-Afghānī was born in Asadabad, not in Asterabad; p. 323: the association of Qutb with Sufism is extremely questionable; pp. 351–2: it is inaccurate to claim that *waqf* (bequest) never became a general legal category in Muslim jurisprudence; p. 352: there is no evidence to claim that "several" Muslim philosophers led "extremely hazardous lives" as an indication of the general precariousness of philosophical activity; historical fact rather indicates that they generally flourished and prospered: one might mention Muhammad b. Zakariyyā al-Rāzi, al-Fārābī, Yahyā b. `Adi, Avicenna, and the dynasties of philosopher-physicians and translators in the service of the Caliphate, and indeed Ibn Rushd and Sarakhsī before their political misfortunes. In all, suggesting an incommensurable disjunction between "Islam" and philosophy by referring to the misfortunes of some Muslim philosophers is not unlike inferring an absolute disjunction between philosophy and Christianity from the misfortune of Hypatia, the philosopher lynched by a Christian mob in Alexandria in 415. Finally, clearly attracted to the idea of rendering an authentic Muslim voice into English, the author has in fact rendered a variety of Arabic terms in a way at once ungainly and potentially distorting, hovering between misapprehension and error. One example will suffice: *al-Usūliyyūn* is rendered as "the Principled Ones" throughout. Now of course the term *Usūl* does mean in itself "principles," among other things. But in Black's sources it is an ellipsis for experts in the "two sciences of principles," theology and law, and refers more especially in the context of this book to a particular section of Shi`ite hierocracy which emphasizes legal deduction at the expense of legal tradition.

Notes

- ¹ I am most grateful to a number of friends and colleagues who have read and commented upon an earlier version of this chapter: Said Arjomand, Nadia al-Bagdadi, János Bak, Yehuda Elkana, Garth Fowden, Wael Hallaq, Almut Hoefert, Janet Nelson, David Powers, Walid Saleh, and Hayden White.
- ² The following works will be discussed in the course of this article, references to which will be made in brackets within the body of the text: Anthony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought from the Prophet to the Present*, Edinburgh, 2001; Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh, 2004—a US edition was published as *God's Rule. Government and Islam*, by Columbia University Press.
- ³ W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* [1968], 6th impression, Edinburgh, 2003.
- ⁴ There are few, but not insignificant, technical, linguistic and factual errors in Crone's book; Black's publishers have clearly not served their author as well as they might, and allowed the book to appear with an unusual body of errors. These, with respect to both cases, are discussed in the Appendix to this chapter.
- ⁵ This historiography, with variants, is generally repeated in German scholarship as well. See T. Nagel, *Staat und Glaubensgemeinschaft im Islam*, 2 vols., Zurich and Munich, 1981, whose title already announces an historiographic programme. Scholarship in French is generally more subtle and nuanced. See for instance J. Dakhli, *Le divan des rois*, Paris, 1998, which has broader anthropological and thematic orientations and a greater methodological sophistication, despite a certain furtiveness and an incomplete control of historical material.
- ⁶ For a good argument, empirical and conceptual at the same time, against these institutional habits in the field of the emergence of Islamic law, both generally and with specific regard to law governing patronage, refuting claims for its "parthenogenesis," see P. Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, Cambridge, 1987, pp. 2 ff. and *passim*—the overall thesis has attracted criticism: W. Hallaq, "Use and Abuse of Evidence: the Question of Roman and Provincial Influences on Early Islamic Law," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 110 (1989), pp. 79–91.
- ⁷ The locus classicus is of course G. E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam. A Study in Cultural Orientation*, Chicago, 1953. On the trope of such "perfect identity"—an alias for indistinction—in scholarship on Islam, see A. Laroui, "The Arabs and Cultural Anthropology: Notes on the Method of Gustave von Grunebaum," in idem, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?*, tr. D. Cammell, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, ch. 3. This rhetorical trope is of course an important component in the culture-morphological approach to history which predominates in the writing of Islamic history.
- ⁸ Perhaps most systematically: R. Levy, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Islam*, 2 vols., London, 1930–33 (2nd. ed. published by Cambridge University Press as *The Social Structure of Islam* in 1957 and reprinted in 1962). In the field of Islamic political and social thought, with an almost sentimentalist

appreciation energized by distant echoes of St. Augustine: L. Gardet, *La cité musulmane*, Paris, 1967.

- ⁹ For a very clear warning about these excesses of such a reductive procedure in which the world is stood upon its head, and for an exemplary historical sense, see C. Cahen, "Considérations sur l'utilisation des ouvrages de droit musulman par l'historien," in idem, *Les peuples musulmans dans l'histoire médiévale*, Damascus, 1977, pp. 81–90.
- ¹⁰ The literature on these matters is very large. See especially B. Stierle, "Schriftauslegung der Reformationszeit," *Verkündigung und Forschung* 16/1 (1971), pp. 55–88, for a review of issues; and A. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, Oxford, 1987, ch. 4–7. For overall historical considerations, see especially A. Kemp, *The Estrangement of the Past. A Study in the Origins of Modern Historical Consciousness*, Oxford and New York, 1991, pp. 81 ff. For analytical studies, see in particular T. Todorov, *Symbolisme et interprétation*, Paris, 1978; part 2; B. Cerquiglini, *Eloge de la variante. Histoire critique de la philologie*, Paris, 1989; C. Jacob, "Du livre au texte. Pour une histoire comparée des philologies," *Diogenes* 186 (1999), pp. 4–27; and *Speculum* 65/1 (1990) (special issue on The New Philology). For Muslim texts, where research into this matter is in its infancy, see particularly M. al-Haddād, *Muhammad 'Abduh. Qirā'a jadīda fī khitāb al-islāh al-islāmī* [Muhammad 'Abduh. A New Reading of the Discourse of Islamic Reform], Beirut, 2003, pp. 78 ff.; and W. C. Smith, "The True meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian's Nonreductionist Interpretation of the Qur'ān," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11 (1980), pp. 487–505.
- ¹¹ P. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay in Interpretation*, New Haven, 1970, pp. 26–27, and see the interpretation of this passage with regard to medieval European letters in B. Stock, *Listening for the Text. On the Uses of the Past*, Philadelphia, 1990, pp. 39–40.
- ¹² I shall feel obliged, here and later, to follow Crone's *sunna*, or salutary example (Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. ix), and refer to my own publications. A. Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, London, 1986, pp. 114 ff.
- ¹³ U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, London, 1977, §§ 2.14.3 f.
- ¹⁴ See W. A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, Cambridge, 1987; B. M. Wheeler, *Applying the Canon in Islam. The Authorization and Maintenance of Interpretive Reasoning in Hanafi Scholarship*, Albany, 1996; M. M. Yunis Ali, *Medieval Islamic Pragmatics. Sunni Legal Theorists' Models of Textual Communication*, London, 2000; D. A. Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image. Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, Princeton, 2001; W. A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition. The Qur'ān Commentary of al-Tha'labī*, Leiden, 2004. Yet, despite this, and despite the techniques of reading the canon through a variety of traditions, many modern scholars seem impatiently to deride these contexts and techniques of interpretation, blaming medieval Muslim exegetes for not having had proper instruction in 19th century positivist philology, taking such simplistic summariness for intellectual robustness. Thus, for an instance of missing the point of medieval techniques of

reading and notions of foundational text: "Given that the entire exegetical tradition is characterized by a proliferation of diverse interpretations, it is legitimate to wonder whether guess-work did not play as great a role in its creation as did recollection"—P. Crone, "Two Legal Problems Bearing on the Early History of the Qur'ān," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18 (1994), p. 2.

- ¹⁵ See A. Al-Azmeh, "The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism," in *Canonisation and Decanonisation*, ed. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn, Leiden, 1998, pp. 202–3, this book, ch. 4. For similar skepticism on the part of a modern Muslim reformist transiting to the philological from the pre-philological notions of text: M. `Abduh, *al-Hāshiya `alā sharh al-Dawwānī* [Marginal Gloss on the Commentary of al-Dawwānī on al-Ījī's Dogmatic Theology], Cairo, 1958 (the text was written in 1873, published Cairo in *Hāshiyatayy al-`allāma al-muhaqqiq `Abd al-Hakīm al-Siyālkūtī wa'l-`allāma al-mudaqqiq fadālat al-shaykh Muhammad `Abduh mufti al-diyār al-misriyya kilāhumā `alā sharh al-imām al-fādil al-mawlā Muhammad b. As'ad al-Siddiqī al-shahīr bi'l-Jalāl al-Dawwānī `alā'l-`Aqā'id al-`Adudiyya* in 1322 [1904–5]), pp. 1–29. This uncertain manner of dealing with incompatibilities between the rational and the traditionally doxographic is of course not unique to Islam, but is ubiquitous in traditionalist discourse. For the workings of this in Judaism: M. Halbertal, *People of the Book. Canon, Meaning and Authority*, Cambridge, Mass., 1997, pp. 29 ff. For an example of a similar disjunction between the cognitive and the traditionally normative in Christianity: P. Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum. The Function of Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melancthon*, Geneva, 1961, pp. 312 ff. and *passim*; more generally formulated: J. P. Deconchy, *Orthodoxie religieuse et sciences humaines*, Paris and The Hague, 1980, pp. 35 ff.
- ¹⁶ A. Al-Azmeh, "Chronophagous Discourse. A Study of Clerico-Legal appropriation of the World in an Islamic Tradition," in *Religion and Practical Reason*, ed. F. E. Reynolds and D. Tracy, Albany, 1994, pp. 180 ff. (this book, ch. 3); idem, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, London, 1986, pp. 87 ff.
- ¹⁷ Possible citations are innumerable. See for instance, and almost at random, al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā min `ilm al-`usūl* [Quintessence of the Science of the Principles of Jurisprudence], Cairo, 1937, vol. 1, pp. 79–80.
- ¹⁸ Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, pp. 50 ff.
- ¹⁹ P. Buc, *L'ambiguïté du livre. Princes, pouvoir et peuple dans les commentaires de la Bible au moyen âge*, Paris, 1994, *passim*.
- ²⁰ Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 163 ff.
- ²¹ E. Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*, Tübingen, 1912.
- ²² Cf. A. Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. A. Dundes, Englewood Cliffs, 1965, p. 137.
- ²³ The unreflected trope of decline has been subject to much analysis, contestation and precision in the past half century, not least in the context of imperial histories and particularly the paradigmatic case of Rome, which led to the recent flowering of Late Antique historiography. It will suffice here for pur-

- poses of general orientation to mention R. Starn, "Meaning-Levels in the Theme of Historical Decline," *History and Theory* 14 (1975), pp. 1–31; R. Koselleck, *Niedergang. Studien zu einem geschichtlichen Thema*, Stuttgart, 1980, pp. 214 ff. and *passim*; P. Chaunu, *Histoire et décadence*, Paris, 1984, *passim*; N. Yoffee and G. L. Cowgill (eds.), *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations*, Tucson, 1988; J. A. Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, Cambridge, 1988; and A. Demandt, *Der Fall Roms. Die Auflösung des römischen Reiches im Urteil der Nachwelt*, Munich, 1984, especially 431 ff., 586 f. for a discussion of the culture-morphological notions of decline under discussion here, and Part IV, *passim*, for a systematic consideration of this paradigmatic case overall—the other, not unrelated theme of Ottoman decline, would repay systematic and detailed consideration. For the "decline of Islam," the classical repertoire of studies is still R. Brunschvig, and G. E. von Grunbeaum (eds.), *Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l'histoire de l'Islam*, Paris, 1957, with papers and discussions on this topic by scholars who reacted with incomprehending horror to the suggestion by the representative of a more developed field of scholarship, H.-I. Marrou that "decline" might be a complex matter, and that popular conceptions of Roman history may not be used as an exemplary case in point (pp. 109–123). See A. Al-Azmeh, "Islam and the History of Civilisations," *Tidskrift för Mellanöst-studier* 2 (2002), pp. 68 ff. (reprinted in this book, ch. 2). For the theme of decline and the rise of the historiography of Late Antiquity, see P. Brown et al., "The World of Late Antiquity Revisited," *Symbolae Osloensis* 72 (1997), pp. 5–90.
- ²⁴ A. Hourani, "History" in *The Study of the Middle East. Research and Scholarship in the Humanities and the Social Sciences*, ed. L. Binder, New York and London, 1976, pp. 114–5.
- ²⁵ See M. Olender, *The Languages of Paradise. Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, tr. A. Goldhammer, Cambridge, Mass., 1992, pp. 54 ff.; A. Al-Azmeh, "Islam and the History of Civilisations," pp. 72 ff.
- ²⁶ H. A. R. Gibb, *Studies in the Civilisation of Islam*, ed. S. J. Shaw and R. J. Polk, London, 1962, p. 14.
- ²⁷ There is much interesting scholarship on this, and on the correlation between Islam and its Arabian moment of inception. See most recently M. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, Chicago, 2005, pp. 171 ff., 186 ff., 192 ff., and ch. 5, *passim*. Friedrich Max Müller's had already most thoroughly questioned such views, not least the poetical obscurantism they subtend; *ibid.*, pp. 218 ff.
- ²⁸ See in particular: A. Hourani, "Islam in European Thought," in *idem*, *Islam in European Thought*, Cambridge, 1991, ch. 1; A. Hourani, "Islam and the Philosophers of History," in *idem*, *Europe and the Middle East*, London, 1980, ch. 2; M. Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, tr. R. Veinus, London, 1988, pp. 85 ff.; G. Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab*, Stanford, 2003, pp. 120 ff.; Al-Azmeh, "Islam and the History of Civilisations," pp. 75 ff.
- ²⁹ A. al-Azmeh, "Tropes and Temporalities of Historiographic Romanticism," see present volume, ch. 1.
- ³⁰ See, for clarifications in this regard, A. Al-Azmeh, "Geschichte, Kultur und die Suche nach dem Organischen," in *Die Vielfalt der Kulturen*, ed. J. Rüsen,

- M. Gottlob, and A. Mittag, Frankfurt, 1998, pp. 89 ff. and *passim* (this book, ch. 1)
- ³¹ Professor Lewis is one of very few academics singled out for approval by a shrill and denunciatory US neo-conservative politico-academic lobby on Middle East Studies (www.campus-watch.org/recommends.php). Among the few others singled out for approval on grounds of reliability is Professor Crone. See the clarion-call of M. Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand. The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America*, Washington D.C., 2001; and B. Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans. Interpreting the Middle East*, New York, 2004 (which contains the notorious "The Roots of Muslim Rage"). See the comments of Z. Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 130 ff., 173 ff., 251 ff., and ch. 7, *passim*; P. Waldman, "A Historian's Take on Islam Steers U. S. in Terrorism Fight," *Wall Street Journal*, 3 February 2004; G. Salamé, *Quand l'Amerique refait le monde*, Paris, 2005, pp. 440 ff.
- ³² See A. Al-Azmeh, "Civilisation, Culture and the New Barbarians," *International Sociology* 16/1 (2001), pp. 75–93.
- ³³ Hourani, "History," pp. 98 ff., 113; Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, pp. 117 ff.
- ³⁴ M. Mauss, in *Civilisation. Le mot et l'idée* (Centre International de Synthèse, Première Semaine internationale de synthèse), Paris, 1930, p. 94.
- ³⁵ Even discerning, erudite and conceptually aware scholars seem to be almost automatically susceptible to such demotic commonplaces, and move imperceptibly from summary statements to the summary dismissal of entire histories, their designation as irrelevant for conceptual or comparative purposes, as if by a scoffing legerdemain in the guise of recognition. For recent examples, almost at random: J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil. Politische Theologie in Ägypten, Israel und Europa*, Munich and Vienna, 2000, p. 27 n. 41; J. Lambert, *Le dieu distribué. Une anthropologie comparée des monothéismes*, Paris, 1995, pp. 245 ff.; and L. K. Little, "Cypress Beams, Kufic Script and Cut Stone: Rebuilding the Master Narrative of European History," *Speculum* 79/4 (2004), p. 928.
- ³⁶ For instance, Q. Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8/1 (1969), pp. 10 ff.; M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, tr. A. M. Sheridan Smith, London, 1972, pp. 3 ff., 11 f., 21 f., 141 ff.; `A. al-`Arwī, *Mafhūm at-tārikh* [The Concept of History], Beirut, 1992, pp. 283 ff. For "radical anteriority" as a principle of order in the history of religions, of considerable relevance to the structure of traditions religious and otherwise, see in particular M. Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde. Une histoire politique de la religion*, Paris, 1985, pp. xv ff. and chs. 2 and 3, *passim*. On the notion of tradition overall, see most especially S. Wiedenhöfer, "Tradition, Traditionalismus," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. R. Koselleck et al., 4th ed., Stuttgart, 1992, vol. 6, pp. 607–649, and P. Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse*, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 2ff., 10, 32ff., 79ff., 118.
- ³⁷ Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, pp. 85 ff.

- ³⁸ In the cognate fields of Late Antique and medieval European political thought, for instance, in work as rich and as different as that of Georges Duby (particularly *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme*, Paris, 1978), Janet Nelson (for example: "Kingship and Government" in *New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 3, ed. T. Reuter, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 95–129; "Kingship and Empire," in *Carolingian Culture*, ed. R. McKitterick, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 52–87; "Kingship, Law and Liturgy in the Political Thought of Hincmar of Reims," *English Historical Review* 363 (1977), pp. 241–79; and "Symbols in Context: Inauguration Rituals in Byzantium and the West in the Early Middle Ages," *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976), pp. 97–111; and Averil Cameron—for example: "Eusebius of Caesarea and the Rethinking of History," in E. Gabba (ed.), *Tria Corda. Scritti in onore di Arnaldo Momigliano*, (Biblioteca di Athenaeum, I), Como, 1983, pp. 71–88; and "The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine *Book of Ceremonies*" in D. Cannadine and S. Price (eds.), *Rituals of Royalty. Power and Ceremony in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge, 1987, pp. 106–136.
- ³⁹ The literature is substantial and rich. See for instance L. Krieger, "The Autonomy of Intellectual History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34/4 (1973), pp. 499–516; and crucially, P. Burke, "Context in Context," *Common Knowledge* 8/1 (2002), pp. 152–177. For a balanced view of more recent developments, see G. M. Spiegel, "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 65/1 (1990), pp. 59–86. Of course these concerns are not entirely new, and not confined post-structuralist notions of text and textuality: see for instance H. I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, rev. ed., Paris, 1983, pp. 665 ff., and B. Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, pp. 138 ff.
- ⁴⁰ Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, p. 104.
- ⁴¹ *A Study of History*, Oxford, 1951, vol. 2, p. 53.
- ⁴² Hourani, "History," p. 117.
- ⁴³ On this complexity, see especially "Reich," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. Koselleck et al., vol. 5, pp. 423–4 and *passim*, and J. Fischer, *Oriens-Occidens-Europa. Begriff und Gedanke "Europa" in der späten Antike und im frühen Mittelalter*, Wiesbaden, 1957.
- ⁴⁴ For instance, A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991.
- ⁴⁵ P. Buc, *L'ambiguïté du livre*, p. 19.
- ⁴⁶ A. Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship. Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Politics*, London, 1996, ch. 5 "Writing Power," and part II, *passim*. This book is the source of much of what will be said in what follows on Islamic political conceptions.
- ⁴⁷ There is a general assumption, often simplistically conceived, that semantic elements are intrinsically embedded in Semitic consonantal trilateral roots into which various vowel patterns are interdigitated, rather than considering the idea that the semantic treatment of the trilateral scheme might have been a device for the learned lexical and morphological elaboration of Semitic languages. For a crisp classic expression of the standard position, see for instance J. Cantaneau, "Racines et schémas dans les langues sémitiques," in *Actes du XXIe Congrès International des Orientalistes, 1948*, Paris, 1949, pp. 93–95.

See the arguments of P. Larcher, "Où il est montré qu'en arabe classique la racine n'a pas de sens et qu'il n'y a pas de sens à dériver d'elle," *Arabica* 42 (1995), pp. 291–314.

- 48 Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, *passim*; idem, *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation*, London, 1982, pp. 27 ff. and *passim* and `A. al-`Azma, *Al-kitāba al-tārikhiyya wa'l ma'rifa al-tārikhiyya* [Historical Writing and Historical Knowledge], 2nd. ed., Beirut, 1995, pp. 71 ff.
- 49 Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 101 ff.
- 50 Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, pp. 93, 99, and *passim*.
- 51 J. Henninger, "La société bédouine ancienne," in idem, *Arabica Varia. Aufsätze zur Kulturgeschichte Arabiens und seiner Randgebiete*, Freiburg and Göttingen, 1989, pp. 26 ff.
- 52 Al-Tabarī, *Tārikh*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al., Leiden, 1879–1901, vol. 3, p. 1142.
- 53 The literature is considerable. Suffice it in this context to refer to E. Bräunlich, "Beiträge zur Gesellschaftsordnung der arabischen Beduinenstämme," *Islamica* 6 (1934), pp. 68–111, 182–229; J. Henninger, "Altarabische Genealogie," in idem, *Arabica Varia*, p. 54 and pp. 49–82, *passim*; W. Caskel, *Die Bedeutung der Beduinen in der Geschichte der Araber*, Köln and Opladen, 1953 (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Geisteswissenschaften, Heft 8), pp. 11 ff.; W. Caskel, "Der arabische Stamm vor dem Islam," in Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, *Atti del convegno internazionale sul tema: Dalla tribù allo stato*, Rome, 1962, pp. 139–51; W. Caskel, *Ġamharat an-nasab. Das genealogische Werk des Hišām Ibn Muhammad al-Kalbī*, Leiden, 1966, vol. 1, pp. 19 f., 27 ff., 31 ff., 38 ff., 57 ff., 64 ff., vol. 2, pp. 417 and *passim*. For very useful general considerations: Z. Szombathy, "Genealogy in Medieval Muslim Societies," *Studia Islamica* 95 (2002), pp. 5–36. For not dissimilar conditions in barbarian Europe, see P. Geary, *The Myth of Nations. The Medieval Origins of Europe*, Princeton, 2003, the Arabian equivalent of which is still to be written.
- 54 For a proper consideration of some of these elements, see L. al-Bakkāy, *Harakat al-Khawārij. Nash'atuhā wa tatawwuruhā ilā nihāyat al-'ahd al-Umawī* [The Movement of the Kharijites. Its Genesis and Development till the end of the Umayyad Era], Beirut, 2001, pp. 74 ff. and *passim*. One might very well, *mutatis mutandis* and for comparative orientation, refer to more general anthropological and historical studies. Of the former, most notably E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, Oxford, 1949.
- 55 See exemplarily H. Inglebert, *Interpretatio Christiana. Les mutations des savoirs (cosmographie, géographie, ethnologie, histoire) dans l'Antiquité chrétienne (30-630 aprēs J.-C.)*, Paris, 2001. For the Christianisation of pagan exempla: pp. 326 ff. For the Islamisation of exempla in Islamic political thought: Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 104 f.
- 56 The work of Peter Brown has of course been a prime inspiration for opening out the notion of Late Antiquity and assimilating some crucial aspects of Islamic history to its vast swell (above, n. 23). See in particular, and by way of example G. Fowden, *Qusayr `Amra. Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2004; idem, *Empire to Commonwealth, The Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Princeton, 1993;

- E. Key Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain. Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999, ch. 6; M. Morony, *Identity and Material Culture in the Early Islamic World*, Los Angeles, 1995; A. Cameron and L. Conrad, (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, Princeton, 1992 ff.
- ⁵⁷ P. Beskow, *Rex Gloriorum. The Kingship of Christ in the Early Church*, Stockholm, 1962, pp. 173 ff.
- ⁵⁸ Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 119 ff.
- ⁵⁹ There are echoes of other Ullmannesque conceptions elsewhere in Black's treatment of Islamic political thought—the emphasis on legal texts, on church–state relations, the contention that the “lag” between theory and practice reflects incoherence in political theory itself, rather than a consideration of political theory's politico-discursive complexity and the locations and complexities of its social embeddedness and reception: F. Oakley, “Celestial Hierarchies Revisited: Walter Ullmann's Vision of Medieval Politics,” *Past and Present* 60 (1973), pp. 3–48; idem, “Anxieties of Influence: Skinner, Figgis and Early Modern Constitutionalism,” *Past and Present* 151 (1996), pp. 96, 106–7; J. Nelson, review of J. Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300–1450*, London, 1996—Institute of Historical Research, www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/jinty.html. See W. Ullmann, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*, Baltimore, 1966.
- ⁶⁰ These two views reflect of course, like the scholarship under discussion, historiographic orientations, Romantic and otherwise, and associated ideological drifts: see the prescient remarks of B. Stock, “Romantic Attitudes and Academic Medievalism,” in idem, *Listening for the Text*, esp. pp. 63 ff. These are clearly associated with political inclinations. For Schmitt, Peterson, Kantorowicz, and the overall problematic of medieval political theology, see P. Buc, *The Danger of Ritual. Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory*, Princeton, 2001, pp. 212, 229 ff.; and G. Geréby, “Carl Schmitt and Eric Peterson on the Problem of Political Theology. A Footnote to Kantorowicz,” in *Monotheistic Kingship: The Medieval Variants*, ed. J. Bak and A. Al-Azmeh, Budapest, 2004, pp. 31–62.
- ⁶¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree, New York, 1956, pp. 358, 360. For this trope, see A. Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail. La fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'Occident classique*, Paris, 1979.
- ⁶² This is signally missing from Ullmann: Oakley, “Celestial Hierarchies,” pp. 24 ff.
- ⁶³ C. Cahen, “Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie Musulmane du Moyen Age,” *Arabica* V (1958), pp. 225–250, VI (1959), pp. 25–56, 223–265; S. Sabari, *Mouvements populaires à Bagdad à l'époque abbasside IX^e–XI^e siècles*, Paris, 1981.
- ⁶⁴ M. Rajab al-Najjār, *Hikāyāt al-shuttār wa'l-ayyārīn fi't-turāth al-'arabī* [Stories of rascals and thugs in the Arabic literary tradition], Kuwait, 1981, pp. 90 f. and *passim*.
- ⁶⁵ F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, London, 1992, particularly ch. VII.
- ⁶⁶ Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 131 ff. and ch. 7, *passim*.
- ⁶⁷ See the comments of J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert der Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, Berlin and New York, 1991–97, vol. III, pp. 456 ff., 481, 486, 502 ff.

This persecution is generally treated very summarily, despite its great complexity. For an impression of this complexity, see *ibid.*, chapter 3 *passim*; and F. Jadʿān, *Al-Mihna*, Amman, 1989.

⁶⁸ Z. M. al-Maʿāitah, *Nashʿat ad-dawāwīn wa tatawwurihā fī sadr al-Islām* [The Formation and Development of Administrative Bureaus in Early Islam], al-ʿAyn, 2000, pp. 230, 234 f.

⁶⁹ For instance: C. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 162 ff.

⁷⁰ Hourani, "History," p. 119.

⁷¹ The analogy is quite common in the literature. The simple image of the Rabbinate as an autocephalous community leadership seeking to "rabbinise" the Israelites collectively (J. Neussner, "Rabbinic Judaism in Late Antiquity," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, New York, 1987, vol. 12, pp. 189 and 189 ff.) and transform them into a community devoted to the study of the Talmud in anticipation of deliverance, seems to undergird the conception of the *ʿulamā*. But of course the history of the medieval Rabbinate is a complex one. They performed a wide array of functions, social, devotional, legal, educational, and magical, and they were collectively and gradually professionalized in the course of the Middle Ages. There were significant differences between those under the authority of the Babylonian Geonim, the Spaniards, and the Europeans, all of which was a function of political arrangements under which they were active. The simpler image seems to derive principally from the Tosefists of France and Germany. Rabbinical autocephaly was highly mitigated by the varying degrees of central control, perhaps most pronounced among those subject to the Geonim, whose prerogatives included certification and ordination. See Halbertal, *People of the Book*, pp. 96 ff., and "Semikhah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, 1971, vol. 14, pp. 142–3. In contrast, the *ʿulamā* represented imperial religion and its legal and other institutions.

⁷² E. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton, 1957, p. 193

⁷³ On which see especially G. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre. Étude sur le "césaropapisme" byzantin*, Paris, 1996.

⁷⁴ See most especially P. Legendre, *L'amour du censeur: Essai sur l'ordre dogmatique*, Paris, 1974, *passim*; and, for a perspective from experimental social psychology, Deconchy, *Orthodoxie religieuse et sciences humaines*, pp. 7 ff.

⁷⁵ An idea of these possibilities might be obtained from M. ʿAjīna, *Mawsūʿat asāʾir al-ʿArab ʿan al-Jāhiliyya* [Encyclopaedia of Arab Myths concerning the Jahiliyya], Beirut, 1994, vol. 1, pp. 170 ff. (on the creation of mankind), vol. 2, pp. 64 ff. (on Satan); W. al-Saʿfī, *al-ʿAjīb waʾl-Gharīb fī kutub al-Taʾfīr* [The Strange and the Marvellous in Works of Koranic Exegesis], Tunis, 2001, pp. 83 ff.; and E. Beck, "Iblis und Mensch, Satan und Adam: Der Werdegang einer koranischen Erzählung," *Le Muséon* 89 (1976), pp. 195–244. See also W. Beltz, *Die Mythen des Korans*, Düsseldorf, 1980.

⁷⁶ For instance, autochthonous Arabian myths deployed typologically to ground Muhammad's priestly-prophetic authority: J. Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough*, Chicago, 1996, p. 112 and *passim*.

- ⁷⁷ Buc, *L'ambiguïté du livre*, pp. 71 ff.—or indeed for a notion of God's government much closer in letter and spirit to that Crone infers from her myth than to medieval Muslim notions: J.-B. Bossuet, *Politics drawn from the Very Words of the Holy Scripture*, tr. P. Riley, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 1, 39–40.
- ⁷⁸ P. Beskow, *Rex Gloriorum*, pp. 33 ff., 123 ff., 261 ff., 295 ff., 313 ff.
- ⁷⁹ Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, part 2, *passim*; K. 'Abd al-Latif, *Fī tashrīh usūl al-istibdād. Qirā'a fī nizām al-ādāb as-sultāniyya* [Of the Natural Anatomy of Despotism: a Reading of the Structure of Sultanic Literature], Beirut, 1999, pp. 108 ff.
- ⁸⁰ I. Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, tr. H. B. Nisbet in *Kant: Political Writings*, Cambridge, 1970, §§ 4, 6.
- ⁸¹ K. F. Morrison, *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West*, Princeton, 1982, pp. 82–93.
- ⁸² For a rich view of this, Ulrika Mårtensson, *The True New Testament: Sealing the Heart in al-Tabarī's Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk*, doctoral thesis, Uppsala University, Department of Theology, 2001. On Muhammad and Moses: K. Prenner, *Muhammad und Musa. Struktur-analytische und theologie-geschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den mekkanischen Musa-Perikopen des Qur'an*, Altenberge, 1986. On monotheistic political typologies, see Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 41 ff.; on Muslim typologies in general, 'A. al-'Azma, *Al-kitāba al-tārīkhiyya wa'l ma'rifa al-tārīkhiyya*, ch. 3.
- ⁸³ Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, *passim*; in shorter compass: idem, "Monotheistic Kingship," in *Monotheistic Kingship*, ed. Bak and Al-Azmeh, pp. 9–30 (this book, ch. 9).
- ⁸⁴ Initially: E. Peterson, *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem*. More recently, and by way of example of the possibilities opened by such a perspective: Beskow, *Rex Gloriorum*, especially pp. 313 ff.; and M. Wallraff, *Christus versus Sol. Sonnenverehrung und Christentum in der Spätantike*, Münster, 2001 (*Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Ergänzungsband 32).
- ⁸⁵ See in particular, for an early period commonly regarded as the point at which the "divorce" between state and society and between Caliphate and 'ulamā occurred, the convincing contrary conclusions of M. Q. Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbasids. The Emergence of the Proto-Sunni Elite*, Leiden, 1997. Similarly, historical fact disproves the contention of a "triumph" of the literalist and pietistic party from this point onwards: C. Melcheot, "Religious Policies of the Caliphs from al-Mutawakkil to al-Muqtadir, A.H. 232–295/A.D. 847–908," *Islamic Law and Society* 3(1996), pp. 316–42. For later periods, see in particular G. Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqil et la résurgence de l'Islam traditionaliste au XI^e siècle*, Damascus, 1963, *passim*; H. Laoust, "Le Hanbalisme sous le Califat de Bagdad (241/855–656/1258)," *Revue d'Études Islamiques* 27 (1959), pp. 67–128; idem, "Le Hanbalisme sous les Mamlouks Bahrides (658–784/1260–1382)," *Revue d'Études Islamiques* 28 (1960), pp. 1–71; idem, "La pensée et l'action politiques d'Al-Māwardī (364/450–974/1058)," *Revue d'Études Islamiques* 36 (1968), pp. 11–92 [reprinted in idem, *Pluralismes dans l'Islam*, Paris, 1983, pp. 177–258]—this last is a crucially important study not mentioned by Crone, and cited but unused by Black.

- ⁸⁶ Such a notion has decided consequences for the study of the *ʿulamā*. In light of it, these are seen as a socially non-specific, all-purpose, fairly homogeneous and protean social actor performing its all-purpose role by virtue of authority arising, naturally, from religion in a society seen as essentially unstructured by anything but “primary” relations and “primordial” loyalties, and by definition estranged from the state, and thus united by nothing except religion represented by the *ʿulamā*. Thus, for instance, in the much-quoted work of I. M. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Mass., 1967; and in the post-modern expression of similar ideas by M. Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350*, Cambridge, 1994.
- ⁸⁷ An impression of the complexity of this important notion may be gathered from C. Mansour, *L'Autorité dans la pensée musulmane. Le concept d'ijmā' (consensus) et la problématique de l'autorité*, Paris, 1975 (*Études Musulmanes* XVIII); and N. Calder, “Ikhtilāf and Ijmā’ in Shāfi’i’s *Risāla*,” *Studia Islamica* 58 (1983), pp. 55–81.
- ⁸⁸ H. Schlusser, *Der Primat der Heiligen Schrift als theologisches und kanonisches Problem im Spätmittelalter*, Wiesbaden, 1977, pp. 11 f.
- ⁸⁹ This collective self-ratification invites some comparison with the Rabbinate, which is similarly self-certifying and which is similarly sensible to internal diversity resulting from the “ultimate contingency of all truth claims”—see D. Boyarin, *Border Lines. The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia, 2004, pp. 152–3.
- ⁹⁰ Possible citations are innumerable. See J. Dammen McAuliffe, “Text and Textuality: Q. 3:7 As a Point of Intersection,” in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’an*, ed. I. J. Boullata, London, 2000, pp. 61 ff.
- ⁹¹ On certification, see G. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges. Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, Edinburgh, 1981, pp. 140 ff.—this book will also give the reader an appreciation of the educational process in question overall, of its techniques, structures and complexities.
- ⁹² al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ittiqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* [Proficiency in the Koranic Sciences], Cairo, 1949 [A.H. 1368] vol. 1, p. 101.
- ⁹³ This view reflects an extremely resilient prejudice in studies of medieval Arabic philosophy. For a systematic corrective, see D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbasid Society*, London, Routledge, 1998; and idem, “The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay in the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy,” *British Society for Middle East Studies. Bulletin* 29/1 (2002), pp. 5–25.
- ⁹⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-qussās wa’l-mudhakkirīn* [The Book of Story-Tellers and Admonishers], ed. M. S. Swartz, Beirut, n.d.
- ⁹⁵ *al-Misbāh al-mudī fī khilāfāt al-Mustadī’* [The Luminous Lantern on the Caliphate of al-Mustadī’], ed. N. ‘Abd Allāh Ibrāhīm, 2 vols., Baghdad, 1976–7.
- ⁹⁶ *Manāqib al-Imām Ahmad Ibn Hanbal* [The Gestae of Ibn Hanbal], Beirut, 1973.
- ⁹⁷ Apart from works of *hisba* and collections of concrete responsa (*fatāwā*—most notably the north African and Andalusian collection of Wansharīsī

- (d. 1508)—on which work is based Powers' book cited below, n. 107), a start might be made with medieval works by jurists that take up the iniquities of the *'ulamā* themselves, such as Subkī's *Mu'īd al-ni'am wa mubīd al-niqam* [The Restorer of Graces and the Destroyer of Disfavours], ed. D. W. Myhrman, London, 1908; and works that discuss common practices in terms of the *fiqh*, such as *al-Madkhal* [The Preface] of Ibn al-Hājj al-Fāsī (4 vols., Cairo, n.d.)
- ⁹⁸ See the comments of S. B. Chapman, "How the Biblical Canon Began," in *Homer, The Bible and Beyond*, ed. G. Stroumsa and M. Finkelberg, Leiden, 2003, pp. 43 f. It is little noted in this regard that whereas, in Rabbinical Judaism, the legal rulings of the Talmud do constitute part of the inspired canon, the same cannot be said for Muslim legal works.
- ⁹⁹ The attitudes are comparable and ubiquitous. See B. Stock, *The Implications of Literacy. Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Princeton, 1983, pp. 28–30.
- ¹⁰⁰ R. Lim, *Public Disputation, Power and Social Order in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994, 153 f. and *passim*.
- ¹⁰¹ N. Calder, "Friday Prayer and the Juristic Theory of Government: Sarakhī, Shīrāzī, Māwardī," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XLIX/1 (1986), pp. 35–47.
- ¹⁰² Especially al-Shatībī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī usūl al-ahkām* [Concordances in the Principles of Jurisprudence], ed. M. Munīr, Cairo, 1922 [A.H. 1341], vol. 2, pp. 225 ff., vol. 3, p. 7; and cf. al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, vol. 1, pp. 63, 174. On divine accomodation, see S. D. Benin, "The Cunning of God and Divine Accommodation," *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 45 (1948), pp. 179–191.
- ¹⁰³ See particularly R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 8th ed., Tübingen 1980, pp. 218–9; A. Funkenstein, *Heilsplan und natürliche Entwicklung. Formen der Gegenwartsbestimmung im Geschichtsdenken des Mittelalters*, Munich 1965, pp. 78–79, 129–130 n27; M. Forschner, *Ueber das Handeln im Einklang mit der Natur. Grundlagen ethischer Verständigung*, Darmstadt 1998, pp. 16–17, 74. I am grateful to Dr. Matthias Riedl for directing me to these references.
- ¹⁰⁴ A. Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman*, Paris, 1967 ff., vol. 2, ch. 3; A. Al-Azmeh, "Barbarians in Arab Eyes," in *Past and Present*, 134(1992), pp. 7–8. Quite the opposite of incuriosity is noted by some general accounts of the history of ethnology: for instance, J. Poirier, "Histoire de la pensée ethnologique" in *Ethnologie générale (Encyclopédie de la Pléiade)*, vol. XXIV), Paris, 1968, pp. 8–9.
- ¹⁰⁵ For a corrective, see `A. `A. Murād, *Dawlat al-sharī'a. Qirā'a fī jadaliyyat al-dīn wa'l-siyāsa `inda Ibn Sīnā* [The State of the Sharī'a. A Reading of the Dialectics of Religion and Politics in Avicenna], Beirut, 1999.
- ¹⁰⁶ Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 190 ff. and *passim*.
- ¹⁰⁷ See D. S. Powers, *Law, Society and Culture in the Maghrib, 1300–1500*, Cambridge, 2002.
- ¹⁰⁸ For instance: al-Sakkākī, *Mafātīh al-`ulūm* [Keys to the Sciences], Cairo, 1937, p. 170; Ghazālī, *Mustasfā*, vol. 1, p. 322 ff.

- ¹⁰⁹ See for instance B. Johansen, "Die sündige, gesunde Amme. Moral und gesetzliche Bestimmung (*hukm*) im islamischen Recht," *Die Welt des Islams* 28 (1988), pp. 264–282, reprinted in idem, *Contingency in Sacred Law: Legal and Ethical Norms in the Muslim fiqh*, Leiden, 1999; and Sh. Chehata, "La religion et les fondements du droit en Islam," *Archives de Philosophie de Droit* 18 (1973), 19 ff.
- ¹¹⁰ 'Abd al-Latīf, *Tashrīh*, pp. 76 ff., 186 ff.; M. E. Subtelny, *Le monde est un jardin. Aspects de l'histoire culturelle de l'Iran médiéval*, Paris, 2002, *passim*.
- ¹¹¹ This claim is normally officiated by means of the trope of the "closure of the Gate of Ijtihād," repeated by Crone, Black, and many others. See W. B. Hallaq, "Was the Gate of Ijtihād Closed?," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 (1984), pp. 3–41; and now A. Turki, "Aggiornamento juridique: continuité et créativité ou la fiction de la fermeture de la porte de l'Ijtihād?," *Studia Islamica* 94 (2002), pp. 5–66.
- ¹¹² Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 101 ff.; 'Abd al-Latīf, *Tashrīh*, pp. 145 ff.
- ¹¹³ For an historical approach, see M. al-Rahmūnī, *Al-Jihād min al-Hijra ilā' l-da'wa ilā' l-dawla* [Jihad: from the Emigration, to Proselytism, to the State], Beirut, 2002.
- ¹¹⁴ B. R. Foster, "Agoranomos and Muhtasib," *Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient* 13 (1970), pp. 128–144.
- ¹¹⁵ F. Millar, "The Roman *coloniae* of the Near East: A Study in Cultural Relations," in *Roman Eastern Policy and other Studies in Roman History*, ed. H. Solin and M. Kajava, Helsinki, 1990, pp. 42–46, quoted in T. Kaizer, *The Religious Life of Palmyra. A Study of the Social Patterns of Worship in the Roman Period*, Stuttgart, 2002, p. 39.
- ¹¹⁶ Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, pp. 99 f., and ch. 7, *passim*.
- ¹¹⁷ No reference is made here to Weber's notion of *Kadijustiz*.
- ¹¹⁸ Al-Māwardī, *al-Ahkām al-sultāniyya wa'l-wilāyāt al-dīniyya*, ed. M. al-Saqqā, 4th ed., Cairo, 1973, p. 3.

CHAPTER 8

Monotheistic Monarchy

“[die Kultur ist] recht eigentlich die fromme und ordnende, ich möchte sagen, begütigende Einbeziehung des Ungeheueren in den Kultus der Götter.”

Thomas Mann

“Eine politisch-religiöse Feierlichkeit hat einen unendlichen Reiz. Wir sehen die irdische Majestät vor Augen, umgeben von allen Symbolen ihrer Macht; aber indem sie sich vor der himmlischen beugt, bringt sie uns die Gemeinschaft beider vor die Sinne. Denn auch der einzelne vermag seine Verwandtschaft mit der Gottheit nur dadurch zu betätigen, dass er sich unterwirft und anbetet.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

I should like to state at the very beginning my conviction that sacral kingship, in its variety of forms and representations one of which is monotheistic kingship, might in anthropological terms be regarded an Elementary Form of socio-political life: not an autonomous elementary form, but one falling under the category of rulership, of sovereignty in the sense given to the term by Georges Dumézil, without this necessarily entailing the adoption of his trifunctional model which Le Goff saw to be eminently fitting for medieval Europe. Like all other Elementary Forms for the representation of human sociality, this is one of an historical, mutable character which was central to the political and religious life of virtually all polities—not the least paradigmatic of which is the history of ancient Egypt—prior to the great transformation that overcame us all beginning with the seventeenth century. It is an Elementary Form in which sovereign and deity are related by manners and degrees of identification and mimesis. At one extremity of this spectrum of possible relations, full identity ontologically understood is expressed in epiphany, trans-substantiality, and consubstantiality. At the other extremity, the relationship is expressed in terms of a variety of mimetic strategies comprehended by the figures of apostolate, prophecy, and priesthood, or by the altogether more nebulous and spectral—but nevertheless effective—tropes of representation, such as “the shadow of God on earth,” a trope that goes at least as far back as

the Assyrians and was later to be so important in discourses on Muslim kingship.

I do not alas have the opportunity here to discuss why sacral kingship should be such an Elementary Form, or why Hocart in his famous work was moved to assert that: "We have no right, in the present state of our knowledge, to assert that the worship of gods preceded that of kings... Perhaps there never were any gods without kings, or kings without gods."¹ This is a matter that would take us into a discussion of psychoanalytic, social-psychological, and anthropological theories that recall names such as Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, Pierre Clastres, René Girard, Rudolf Otto, and many others. The lack of space here is particularly unfortunate for me, as I do so much wish to think through that most compelling tautology implied by Durkheim's (and, before him, Feuerbach's) conception of the sacred as an irreducible form of societal self-representation,² as something not amenable to specific formulation apart from its relationship to its profane contrary, indeed as "a category of the sensibility" or "a veritably immediate datum of consciousness."³ I will therefore have to rest content with asserting that sacral kingship was a constant motif in all royalist and imperial arrangements that spanned the entire œcumenical expanse of Eurasia from the very dawn of recorded history until modern times, a vast perspective in which the primitive republicanist image of Rome or of Athens seems aberrant, paltry and inconsequential, if indeed this image of republicanist purity, of the splendid childhood of rational political man, has any historical credibility or verisimilitude.

Before going any further with the comparative perspective, a few prefatory words on sacrality will nevertheless be in order. Sacrality, like kingship, expresses principally a relationship articulated in dominant transcendence; there is a striking degree of resemblance between epithets applied to Christ and those applied to Hellenistic and Roman emperors, such as *epiphaneia* and *parousia*, with reference to the solemn arrival of the emperor. Sacrality denotes irreducible removal, a structure of irreducible polarity and subordination, an hierarchical instance beyond hierarchy, a self-referential purity beyond purity and impurity as normally perceived, an irreducible potency incommensurate with any gradations of power. Nevertheless, transcendent sacrality may and often does substantively inseminate lower beings, like kings, or may cast its potent shadow upon them; it is not, like Aristotle's supreme being, only a passive instance of self-reflection and self-referentiality, but is rather related in dominance in a manner that is rather Platonic, or, better, neo-Platonic, acting by energetic emanation. Eliade

was perfectly correct in maintaining that Plato was “the outstanding philosopher” of primitive mentalities, mentalities which, he proposed, are not confined to so-called primitive peoples.⁴ From this statement a number of implications may be drawn, not the least important of which, for my purpose, is that this relationship, articulated in the transcendent dominance of the sacred, is one in which the structure of the cosmos, like that of political society under royal aegis, is articulated by diminishing degrees of mimetic capacity.

I will be more specific. To these diminishing degrees of mimetic capacity correspond greater degrees of pollution, of adulteration with materiality, with humanity increasingly more common and soiled. Yet this structure of continuous passage across degrees and ways of commensurability—from self-identity through to shadowy reflections, as I indicated—is nevertheless governed by an irreducible categorical distinction, indifferently distinguishing, in parallel, God from man and king from subject, and relating God and king together in a common distinction from the common run of humanity in such a way that Louis IX of France could state that “li rois ne tient de nului, fors de Dieu et de lui.”⁵

The complex history of the relationship between gods and kings is a very long one, and is yet remarkably constant. This is not a history that I might reasonably hope to sketch here. What I wish to suggest here are some considerations on the constant motifs involved in enunciations about œcumenical sacral kingship, which connect deity and king by relations of emanation, analogy, genealogy, metonymy, figuration, and apostolate, all of these involving functional parity between king and god in their common functional capacity as demiurges of order, cosmic and human. In the mundane world, this parity is realized by mimesis, by rhetorical or substantive participation in the common terms held by both of them: limitless energy, boundless majesty, and absolute virtue.

Let it be said at this stage that I have used the word “enunciations” quite deliberately, as the enunciations of kingship I have in mind, albeit largely discursive, are also iconographic, ceremonial, ritual, and magical, all of these equally performing the function of crystallizing royal energy in tangible and transmissible forms, crystallizing it in virtually immobile formal and formulaic moulds, most visible in iconography, that freeze out history, politics, and society and render complete the impeccability of kingship, immune to pollution, and reflecting it in the verbal, iconographic, and ceremonial cultivation of the impeccable majesty attaching to the royal person.

Before I start reviewing some relevant historical material I should add the following caveats: I do not mean to imply that all enunciations about kingship are sacral, nor do I by any means wish to imply that all such enunciations rest by necessity upon the full realization of the despotic potential latent to them. Not all impeccable sacred emperors in Baghdad and Constantinople enjoyed the limitless power or deployed the boundlessness energy attributed to them, and the heightened hallucinatory character of enunciations concerning the sublimity of the imperial office did not often tally with political realities: witness, for instance, the conjunction of *vox dei* and *vox populi* in the acclamation of Byzantine emperors by their assertive and demanding armies. Witness also the receipt by overpowering Muslim princes (such as the Saljuqs and the Buyids) of their investiture with almost absolute rule in Baghdad in the course of humiliating ceremonials before Caliphs dependent upon their bounty and protection (this might remind some of us of the relationship at certain points in time between the Basileus in Constantinople and Bulgarian and Serbian kings, of the conferment upon Clovis of an honorary Consulate, or of the so-called *Donatio Constantini*, only revealed as a fraud by Lorenzo Valla's argument from anachronism during the Quattrocento). Witness also the conjunction of divine unction and Frankish *esprit de clan* in Carolingian coronation ceremonies, and, of course the deliciously euphemistic vagueness of discourse on the term *potestas ligendi et solvendi*, so very important to the central legal conception Muslim kingship under the name of *ahl al-hall wa'l-'aqd*, and in all cases a polite euphemism for king-makers who were by no means always polite—or consider, indeed, Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, reigning by Grace of God yet entirely subject to her Parliament and Prime Minister.

And finally, the reference to the anthropological notion of Elementary Forms with which I opened this essay militate against, and indeed render virtually irrelevant, the habitual rigidity with which categorical distinctions are made between polytheistic and monotheistic kingship, and by extension renders generically connected Byzantine, Muslim, and Latin enunciations on sacral kingship, beyond any civilizational divisions that might be imagined in terms of a totemic geography of Orient and Occident or of Islam, Orthodoxy, and the West.

* * *

In close connection with the contention I have just made about the illusory character of certain categorical distinctions, arising from institutional academic inertia no less than from ideological and political exi-

gencies, is the main thesis that I wish to propose: Far from being generically closed in any conceivable manner, monotheistic kingship in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and beyond, is but a constellation of specific inflections within the more general phenomenon or Elementary Form of sacral kingship, just as monotheism is a specific theological and cultic inflection within the more general Form of the theological, political and social manifestations of divinity. For it might very well be asked whether the contrast between monotheism and polytheism is at all relevant to notions of divinity in general, quite apart from its interest to dogmatic theology and the history of religions. It might, further, be maintained that the notion of polytheism itself appears as a polemical notion arising from monotheistic self-definition, and is of doubtful systematic and analytical value, just as it could be maintained that there is little historical force in the deistic notion, much elaborated in the nineteenth century, that polytheism is a degenerate form of an original monotheism, or of Hume's theory (later taken up by nineteenth century Muslim reformers such as Afghani and Muhammad `Abduh) that the history of religions is one of evolution from polytheism to monotheism.⁶

Be that as it may, it can be maintained that, in conceptual terms, transitions from sacral kingship of a polytheistic to one of a monotheistic profession of faith have generally been fairly smooth at the conceptual level, and required in general what we might characterize as adjustments in terms of rhetorical and sometimes institutional transferences. The christianization of Germanic or Slavic polities are interesting cases. Of these one might almost randomly select for consideration a relatively simple, local and clannish polity such as that of Anglo-Saxon England, we would observe a number of patterns supervening in the transition between pagan and Christian kingship which repeated developments in more complex and more central polities, most specifically that of the central areas of late Romanity.

Relationships of filiation as well as transference of capacity had related the supreme deity to these Germanic kings of England,⁷ whose authority derived from their being sprung from Woden. Of the eight Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies that survive, seven record descent from Woden. With the christianization of these kingdoms, at least one did not shed these memories, duly inscribed in an appropriate new register, as Aethelwulf of Wessex in the ninth century recorded Woden as the sixteenth descendent from Scalf, son of Noah, born on the Ark during the Deluge, and therefore a collateral cousin of Jesus Christ himself. In all cases, it seems that the authority of Christ, like that of kings,

was understood as deriving from the force of descent, he being the Son of God, just as Aethelwulf's authority derived from his descent, and his status as the kinsman of Jesus, however distant.

Divine capacities were also transferred. God's charismatic energy, generically a supreme form of pure energy, passed on to humankind by way of the king's person—*miht*, *craeft*, *maegan*, corresponding to the *xwarra* of Iranian gods and kings, often iconographically represented as a rayed nimbus or as a halo, and occasionally as a hand—was christianized as Grace, which is after all a manifestation of pure energy. To the heavenly monarchy of God corresponds the mundane dominion of the king who, like the Christian God and like Woden and his subaltern associates before him, is the possessor, protector, governor and wielder, dispenser, and gift-giver, capacities altogether associated with the term *frea*, used equally for god and for king. *Giftstol* was the term used equally for altar and for throne. And while the Church destroyed the sacrificial king in a sacramental sense, they dubbed him *Christus Domini*, the Lord's Anointed.

More complex but conceptually analogous were developments in more central lands during Late Antiquity. The period witnessed a wholesale transference of the powers and prerogatives of the many pagan gods to the unique—but nevertheless triune—Christian God and later to his Muslim cognate Allah, and their subordination under His exclusive preserve in a universe where they became demons or *jinn*—there was never a denial of the existence of these invisible powers, as any reading of Origen, and after him of Eusebius, Augustine, and other the Church Fathers, or of the Koran, would make clear. The irreducibility of the sacred is tidied up in monotheism by the ingathering of divine functions and energies, hitherto dispersed, and their allocation to one deity, thereby rendering the irreducibility of divinity indivisible, like the indivisibility of royal power. This matter is betokened by the transfer of attributes, epithets and names of energy, majesty, protection, destruction, and kingship, from one theological universe to another, such as the Greek translations of the Old Testament, in which Adonai becomes *kyrios*, a term used for various deities as well as emperors, and Shaddai becomes *Pantocrator*, and El Elyon becomes *theos hypsistos*, a name and celestial attribute habitually applied to Zeus.⁸ Similarly, Christ and, after him, Constantine, took over wholesale the discursive and some of the iconographic attributes of Sol Invictus.⁹ In an analogous continuity of reference to visible and invisible majesty in transcendence, this *theos hypsistos* just mentioned became, in the Koran, al-'Aliy, an exclusive epithet of Allah, as did al-'Aziz and

many other terms derived from names of particular deities and from the attributes of Baʿl and El in Semitic religions, later being the occasion for philosophical theologies and theophoric names.

Quite apart from these rhetorical participations and cultic transferences, it must be stressed that late Roman religions had a pronounced henotheistic tendency that became, with time, fully-fledged monotheism under the combined impact of oecumenical empire, Stoic cosmopolitism and neo-Platonism. This henotheistic streak, which was clearly evident in imperial Roman notions of kingship, can be usefully comprehended under what is called the Orientalism of the late empire. I hope it will be taken for granted that this Orientalism does not indicate the degeneration and adulteration of things purely Roman, whatever these may have been, but that it indicates rather the growth of Rome into imperial maturity, its de-provincialization, at a time when the social, economic and geopolitical centre of gravity of the empire, and ultimately the imperial residences and the capital itself, moved eastwards. If origins and influences were to be sought, then these could safely be specified as the adoption under Hellenistic influence, especially that of the Seleucids, of imperial norms deriving ultimately from Achamaenean Iran. This is an influence which was felt quite early: long after the Athenians and the Macedonians and tyrants of Magna Graecia sought to emulate the political arrangements, the architecture, the manners of dress, and the pottery of the Achamaenean satraps in Anatolia; and long after Cyrus had been set up as an exemplary political figure by Xenophon and after both Plato and Aristotle had praised the political arrangements of the Iranians and the views of pagan political thinkers who thought of God on analogy with the King of Kings—long after these events, Late Republican Romans came to regard rulers, in the Seleucid manner, as the law animate, as *lex animata* or *nomos empsychos*. The term was to remain in use well into the Byzantine empire, exemplified most meaningfully and in complex ways by the imperial lawgivers Theodosius and Justinian,¹⁰ and the question of whether the Roman Pope, as the canonical lawmaker, should not be above the law was to remain with Latin Christianity well into the High Middle Ages. Rulers of Imperial Rome were construed as the mimetic medium of divine virtue and reason; for all his scepticism about the exhibitionist tendencies and postures of Roman sovereigns, Plutarch himself construed the just king as *eikon theon*, and Eusebius thought God the father to be related to Christ as the Emperor did to his own icon, an analogy taken up by the Cappadocian Fathers. Similarly, Philo regarded such a figure of divinity, in the person of Moses, as *nomos*

empsychos and as *o orthos logos*¹¹—and I quote Philo because his enormous influence was of special pertinence to Roman and early Christian conceptions of monarchy; his idea of cosmocracy and of the divine election of the Jews was transmuted from an idea restricted to a tribal collectivity not much interested in it, to an ecumenical and universalist idea of dominion.

It will have been noticed that much of the vocabulary thus used to enunciate kingship is philosophical, and I shall come to this matter presently. Yet there was a magical and mythological substructure to this philosophical elaboration, undertaken by figures such as Diotogenes, Stenidas, and Ecphantus, and in rather more abstract fashion by Themistius and Iamblichus, in terms of the late neo-Platonic, late Stoic, and neo-Pythagorean vocabularies which constituted the philosophical pillars of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. There was a cultic infrastructure connected with the divine philosophical associations of royalty. Let it be remembered that Alexander sacrificed to Marduk in Babylon in his capacity as the last Achamaenean emperor and Apostle of the great deity, and in Egypt to his father Ra`. He was also, on his mother's side, descended from Poseidon and hence from Chronos himself, just as Julius Caesar, who set up for himself an empire-wide cult, hailed from the Iulii, descendants of Romulus, son of Mars: this was a divine connection so real that some legions of Augustus used missiles which bore the inscription "Divum Iulium," and defeated enemies were sacrificed at the altar of Divus Iulius. Not dissimilarly, the Egyptian Ptolemys were sons and daughters of Horus, and, following Seleucid practice, from the death of Augustus in A.D. 14 to the burial in 337 of Constantine shortly after his baptism, 36 of 60 Roman emperors were apotheosized, as were many members of their families. That the emperors Domitian and Diocletian were termed *dominus et deus* is entirely characteristic of this mythological and cultic turn.

The cultic aspect is crucial: imperial cults—the aversion to which, as is well known, was the litmus-test for identifying Christians during the various Roman prosecutions—were instituted to render worshipful homage to the idea of universal empire personified by the emperor who, well into Byzantine times, sent a representation of himself or fully expected one to be made available by Roman governors or provincial citizens, a statue and later an icon, to the provinces in order to receive homage to his holy person, and by implication to the universal empire—an instance of civic religion according to Varros's well-known and analytically most serviceable distinction in Roman religions between the mythological, the physical, and the civic.¹² There is a very com-

plex history of this phenomenon, marked by episodic ebbs and flows, an effervescent variety of local forms and changes of taste for the divine among the emperors and the populace of Rome and the provinces, not the least significant of which was whether emperors regarded themselves as divine, after the Egyptian and the Seleucid fashion, or simply as sacred persons apostolically charged by divinity with the affairs of the world, after the manner generally—but not exclusively—prevalent among populations and states of the Near East. Whereas Diocletian, for instance, was dubbed *dominus et deus*, the Emperor Julian, harking back no matter how ambiguously to more classical ideas of *res publica*,¹³ preferred to declare in his Epistle to the Alexandrians in 362 that the gods, and above all the great Serapis, had judged fit that he should rule the world¹⁴—and that as a consequence Roman citizens must surrender to him the power that emerges from them. There is not here the implication, as with Julian's correspondent Themistius, that the emperor was of divine origin, and no suggestion, as with Eusebius, that Constantine was powered by the Holy Spirit. Interestingly enough, the part of Themistius' Second Epistle concerning the divine origin of the king is absent from the Arabic translation of this text by Ibn Zur'a (d. 1056).¹⁵ Julian preferred instead a rather more humble, mimetic role with respect to divinity; as shepherd and father to men, a mere icon of divinity,¹⁶ all of these also attributes of Christ—though he on other occasions saw himself as the incarnation of Helios,¹⁷ an ambivalence reflecting the incommensurateness of a process as yet incomplete. And while earlier Pagan thinkers like Celsus had regarded the denial of divine multiplicity to be an act of sedition because it derogated local gods and, by extension, Romanity itself, later times saw emperors setting up particular oriental deities as patrons of themselves and of the empire: Mithras for Diocletian, Serapis and Mithras for Julian, and Sol Invictus, identified with a variety of other deities, for a number of others (including Constantine).

Yet beyond this variety, there were elements of unity of direction, a development at once combined and uneven, which characterizes the majestic swell of Late Antiquity, an emergent unity which calls up interesting and important questions of periodization, of delimiting in a complex way a *très longue durée* of the sort proposed by Jacques Le Goff for the Middle Ages, which I cannot consider at present. Suffice it to say that Late Antiquity "decanted"—the expression is Le Goff's¹⁸—the various legacies of Antiquity, Greek, Hellenistic, Roman, and Oriental, all of these most intimately and inseparably imbricated, and that, in so doing, tidied up the civilized world of the day in terms of

the immanent trends, all interrelated, that constituted it: namely, monotheism, absolutism, and universalism.

We have available important studies of the conjunction between these three components, monotheism, absolutism, and universalism, most notably the older study of Erik Peterson¹⁹ and the recent work of Garth Fowden.²⁰ Quite apart from any imputation of causality between monotheism and universalism, which Fowden²¹ has denied with reference to the restricted tribal polities of the Israelites, it is important to signal that the trend towards universalism, syncretistic or homogenizing, is evident from the long history of attempts to set up universal empires—first by Cyrus, followed rather inconclusively by Alexander, on to the Romans following the *pax augusti* and continuing in claims to universality by the Byzantines and their tributaries and successors (copied in the West by ideas of the Holy Roman Empire and notions of *translatio imperii*), and reaching perhaps its most stupendous success under the Caliphate, which combined the geopolitical achievement of Cyrus with Constantine's dream of universal monotheism.²²

Questions of causality apart, there can be little doubt that the crystallization and the pervasive accentuation of divine kingship was closely allied to the universalist vocation of empire—what I have called the de-provincialisation of Rome—and that both were to a very large extent premised on a number of allied developments relative to the centralization of provincial rule, the atrophy of civic structures and of euergetism, and the ethnically and culturally homogenizing policies of the empire, most saliently under the Antonines and the Severans. These processes ran parallel, and were always gradual: it is not often enough appreciated that Constantine was worshipped in his own lifetime, and addressed as *theos* in his new capital, or that in the fifth century Theodosius still set up *flamines* to his own cult in the provinces—the cult of the emperor was only brought to an official end under Valentinian²³—and that overall polytheism and monotheism had boundaries that were altogether porous. Both were elaborated in terms of a subordinationist theology that subjected local deities to a supreme deity, such as Jupiter, Sol, Serapis, or Mithras, local deities being represented by Celsus, for instance, as satraps of the supreme deity.²⁴ In all, the coherence of the political tradition built around the cult of emperors gradually gave away to a coherence emerging from confessional religions, in such a way that ritual coherence gave way gradually to a textual, scriptural coherence. We should not underestimate the great moment of subordinationism with respect to the Emperor's standing relative to Christ: that he is Christ's figure rather than his epiphany, or that he is the *dynamis* of the

Holy Spirit, is a serious matter which requires close anthropological and historical consideration which I cannot initiate now.

The central figure in this development was of course Eusebius,²⁵ Bishop of Caesarea and Constantine's political theologian, whose thinking on matters that follow was to exercise important influences in both East (on John Chrisostom, among others) and West (on St. Ambrose).²⁶ Building at once on early patristic, late neo-Platonic subordinationist metaphysics (corresponding to Varro's "physical" religion), on Biblical exegesis, and most particularly on Origen's reclamation of Romanity in the context of salvation history (this was later expressed by Augustine in the West,²⁷ in his conception of Rome as the Second Babylon, thus forming the centrepiece of God's design to conquer the world through her, and transposed by his acolyte Orosius²⁸ into a veritable theology of history, in a line that continued on to John of Salisbury²⁹ and to Dante³⁰), and finally on the willingness of the Church Fathers such as John Chrisostom "unblushingly"³¹ to place the emperor in the worldly role of God himself, once the empire appeared to have been won for Christianity. The result was the continuous claim on history for Christian typology, in which history "lapped over"³² into political philosophy, and a conception of the emperor set in an universal and indeed a cosmic hierarchy premised on the transcendent and incommensurable removal of its apex—Christ the Pantocrator and his worldly analogue the Emperor, the earthly Autocrator—from what lies beneath. Both are equally participants, rhetorically and without regard to the dogmatic distinction between the two, in the common terms of energy and majesty, and both mirror each other in upholding the principle of monarchy: to the one monarch on earth corresponds the one monarch in Heaven, an idea that was to be ceaselessly repeated alike by Byzantine and Muslim writers on politics. One medieval Muslim theologian indeed suggested that the best proof for the unicity of God was to be had by analogy with the unicity of *worldly* kingship.³³

Cosmic and worldly monarchy as the contraries of divine and political polyarchy³⁴ correspond entirely in this scheme. But this very scheme in its monotheistic inflection renders doctrinally very difficult the identification of imperial monarchy with divinity or the consubstantiality of kingship with divinity. The quasi-divinization of Byzantine emperors was attenuated and ritualized,³⁵ being converted into sanctity, and what remain of such divinization are figures, *eikones*, figures no less real and absolutist for being virtual: figures of mimesis, of emanation, of typology, and of magical contiguity between emperor and cosmocrator. I have already stated that what remains was rhetori-

cal participation; and if we exclude neo-Platonic elaborations of the imperial office by Eusebius, most particularly in his *Tricennial Orations* (esp. Part 1), in terms of emanation from the divine *logos*, we are left only with figuration in which that which is doctrinally and theologically unthinkable and inexpressible is enunciated: this is figuration which acquires reality by repetition rather than through the theological justification which is barred to it, a figuration whose force derives from the illocutionary energy acquired as language, highly formalized and allusive in instances such as this, is subjected to a diminution in propositional energy which is theologically beyond it.

I entirely agree with Gilbert Dagron's statement that, for Oriental Christians, sacerdotal royalty was neither an idea nor a theory, but rather a figure:³⁶ the emperor as the ritual figure of *Christomimesis*, whose sites were iconography, ceremonial, metaphor and political etiquette, which enunciated the rhetorical participation of Christ and of the emperor in the common terms of energy and majesty, yielding a field of magical contiguity and the transference within this field of efficacious grace from God to the emperor. This was expressed in the conferment upon the Basileus of the epithet *hiereus* by the Synod of Constantinople in 449 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451,³⁷ and the application of the qualifier *théos* to all matters that pertained to the person of the emperor,³⁸ including his icon, which is after all related to him in very much the same way as he related to God the Son, by figuration and magical participation.³⁹ Thus the wide range of other qualifiers studied by Otto Treitinger:⁴⁰ that the emperor is the like of God "in so far as this possible," that he is an emanation of the Trinity, the Trinity's elect, king in God and in Christ the eternal king. Thus also is the plastic extension of the emperor's mystical—indeed, mystagogic⁴¹—personality, as frozen in ceremonial postures and mimetic tropes well studied by André Grabar.⁴² And thus finally, by plausible magical exaggeration, was the divine unction received by the *porphyrogennetoi* while still in their mothers' wombs:⁴³ magical exaggeration, but also a typological variation on the theme of the Immaculate Conception. It might be recalled that the kings of France from Clovis onwards were anointed with holy oil contained within a phial delivered to St. Remy by no less a being than the Holy Spirit, and that later the Virgin herself was to deliver holy oil to Thomas à Becket for the anointment of English kings.⁴⁴

The imitation of Christ of which I have been speaking was not confined to mysteries, but extended to the very real ecumenical order whose lynch-pin was the Emperor, calling up, again typologically, the

hierarchical order by means of which the cosmocrator orders the universe, just as ancient deities imposed order upon primordial chaos. The Emperor establishes and maintains *taxiarchia*, proper order, ritual and otherwise, in state, society, church, and army.⁴⁵ This order, as I have suggested, is located in the irreducible difference and generic disparity between God and man as between Emperor and his subjects, premised on a simple structure of subordination and super-ordination. It is as if subjects were enculturated by the presence of the king who, with his capacity for violence (and violence, as we learn from Augustine most especially, is a primary instrument for the imitation of Christ⁴⁶), alone remains within the realm of nature and outside the compass of culture which is guaranteed by his presence. Order is conceived after a neo-Platonic fashion, in which hierarchy is presided over by an imperturbable instance removed from it generically, in self-referential sacrality, energy in a state of pristine purity, beyond refrain or reciprocity yet regulative of all recall and reciprocity that create culture, marshaled by Christ and Emperor for the greater glory of God.

Last but not least, this charter for absolutism, often surreal and hallucinatory, was as I suggested wedded to a theology of history. Typology is not only a discursive device in which allegory moves along the axis of time, but also an intimation of magical participation, as with the icon, where the figure conjures up the presence of the type. It was not only deployed to figure Christ, but also to figure the dominion of Christ in the context of a salvation-historical scheme. In this scheme, imperial Romanity was the universal premise of salvation within historical time. Byzantine as well as western emperors figured not only the timelessness of Christ, but the pre-history and history of his dominions. They were inheritors not only of the *pax augusti*, but also of veterotestamental kings,⁴⁷ just as the Crusaders too were to see themselves as the true Israelites,⁴⁸ and as the Church was the legatee and indeed the typological re-enactment of Noah's Ark—although, as is very well known, conditions differed between Orthodoxy and Latinity on this score. Constantine was a Second David and Augustus, and several later Byzantine emperors were called a Second Constantine—similarly, Constantine's new capital was a Second Rome, and a third was later to be declared in Moscow.

Without going into the vexed question of so-called Caesaropapism, the net result of the differences to which I have just hinted between ecclesiastical arrangements of the Orthodox and Latin churches, was that the separation in the West of Church and state, which led to the creation of an impuissant theocracy, while in Orthodoxy the unity of

church and empire led to the history of a somewhat less interesting “war of positions.”⁴⁹ The continuous assertion of the transcendent status of the emperor was perhaps most acutely expressed when, after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the Sultan received the monk Gennadius in audience and granted him the insignia of the patriarchal office, including his staff and pectoral cross⁵⁰—while the Sultan, though styling himself on Caesar of the Romans, was not in a position to have himself anointed by the patriarch, and would not have wished to have arrogated to himself the sacerdotal aspect of the *Basileus* (which was achieved by at least one Crusader king of Constantinople), he was still the instance in political control of the Orthodox church, a fact which helped the emergence of Orthodox autocephaly everywhere. That apart, space permits me to add only that the sacrality of medieval western kings and emperors was rarely formalized and infrequently ritualized, but was rather diffused, with variations over time, in a setting of sacrality which englobed these kings functionally,⁵¹ rather than being determined by their own sacral person, a situation which allowed the popes to have an aggressively profane notion of kingship. And though the basic flaw of the papal theory was that no pope managed to find “an emperor who would accept the subordinate role devised for him,”⁵² the relationship was managed by piecemeal rapprochements until the central part of the Middle Ages, when as the *sacerdotium* acquired a decided “imperial appearance,” the *regnum* managed to acquire only “a clerical touch.”⁵³

* * *

So far, I have said precious little about Islam, and I propose to continue from where I left off with regard to this particular historical experience of monotheistic monarchy. I have already said that the Muslim Caliphal regime had consummated the universalist trends of Late Antiquity and was the culmination of its tendential orientation. I have also said that, apart from the historical discussion, I am dwelling upon the enunciative form of what I have repeatedly described as an Elementary Form. Comparativism should by no means be confined to a genetic perspective, although I am nevertheless insisting that there is no crucial generic differentiation between Muslim kingship and forms of sacral kingship that preceded it.

The great Franz Cumont once stated that, at the turn of the fourth century, under the Roman Emperor Galerius whose Iranising predilections in matters of state were well-known, “ancient Caesarism founded on the will of the people seemed about to be transformed into a sort

of Caliphate.”⁵⁴ For all its rhetorical flourish, this is a statement of tremendous suggestiveness: it suggests that, polemics aside, a certain conceptual continuum relates the Caliphate as a form of sacral kingship to trends immanent in Late Antiquity which it, in its own way, completed. This is entirely borne out by history, for it is indeed a fact that the regime of the classical caliphate recapitulated and accentuated these trends, forming itself as a specific inflection within them.

What was Islam, after all, but a recovery for monotheism of the last remaining reservation of ancient paganism, this being the Arabian peninsula, and most particularly its western part, from whence the ruling dynasties of the Islamic empire originated? Close scrutiny of the emergence of Islam will show that it recapitulated in the new linguistic medium of Arabic, now become a language of a universal high culture, the historical processes I have been describing whereby henotheism, subordinationist theology, and polytheism gave way to a universalist monotheism correlative with empire. And let it not be supposed that, for all its importance, it was the Koran that gave rise to the Muslim empires of the Umayyads of Damascus and the Abbasids of Baghdad: not only because the Koran is by no means the sum-total of the Muslim canon, and because for generating a concept of a polity it is but stony ground, but also because the Koran related to Muslim polities in much the same highly complex way as the Old and New Testaments related to Christian polities: as a quarry of quotations, examples, and exegetical occasions for the elaboration of concepts of public order that do not emerge from the texts, and when they do so, they do so only partially and to a large extent symbolically and genealogically (I use the latter term with reference to Pierre Bourdieu). The Koran was edited during a period which we might call *palaeo-Islamic*—a period which, I submit, lasted well into the eighth century, giving Muslim monarchs the leeway to toy with traditions in place, sometimes with ingenious playfulness, at a time when they had found themselves suddenly propelled to being masters of most of what mattered in the Late Antique world, from Carcassonne to Tibet, in a period of very rapid transformation, and when the prospect of conquering Constantinople was still very tangible possibility, a fact reflected in the rebuilding of the centre of their capital Damascus in the first half of the eighth century after a manner that resembled, typologically and hopefully, the centre of Constantinople.⁵⁵

Very much in the way we saw Orthodox polities displace matters of enunciating that which is doctrinally inadmissible for monotheism to

the realm of hyperbole, we find that the relentlessly hubristic enunciations on the Caliphate find their proper place in the historical analogies and typologies that we find in historical works, in *Belles-Lettres*, *Fürstenspiegel*, panegyric poetry, administrative manuals, epistolary and testamentary literature, coins, and official documents, and certain theological and philosophical works, no less than in the non-discursive media of ceremonial, architecture, courtly etiquette, emblematics, and caliphal biographies.

In all, kingship, by which is meant absolutism on analogy with the exclusive singularity of God in the cosmos and the indivisibility of His sovereignty, is construed as the form of artificial sociality. In this, the monarch-Caliph imposes culture, that is to say, order, upon humans, and maintains this cultural order by resort to instruments of nature, by the constant use of force and vigilance; for mankind is congenitally recidivist, always hankering after the war of all against all. This is generally premised on a pessimistic anthropology, perhaps most eloquently expressed in the statement by the last Umayyad caliphal secretary Yahyā b. `Abd al-Hamīd al-Kātib in the middle of the eighth century, that “evil inheres in men as fire inheres in a flint-stone.” Kingship—and prophecy—are the corrective. Like God, kings and prophets stand at the apex of a hierarchy of the neo-Platonic type, of which they form no part, with respect to which they are transcendent, and with which they stand in no reciprocity, for without absolute monarchy only chaos is conceivable. This theme of the Caliph as the demiurge of sociality—of culture—was particularly accentuated in Muslim discourses. The Caliph’s transcendence figures as an energy yielding a force which acts, by the violent means of nature, upon human nature in order to produce culture, but yet remains beyond this culture as a reserve of untrammelled nature ever producing and maintaining culture: The Caliph is the untamable tamer and the savage domesticator, continuously exercising the corrective primal violence with which chaos was subdued in primeval times, rather more in the mood of the *Enuma Elish* than that of Greek myths of creation. This is reflected in the caprice of the Caliph and the precariousness of life around him—a caprice and a precariousness which repeat the transcendently narcissistic amorality of the supreme Koranic and Old Testamental deity.

The Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad, after the earliest period of their rule, enhanced the illocutionary power of this description by their absence, for they virtually never appeared in public, and remained instead in the fastness of their palaces, from whence they radiated the invisible sacredness and terrible energy of majesty, and within which

they instituted palatine ceremonial of consummate elaborateness, splendor and solemnity, visually as grandiloquent as any ceremonial seen in Constantinople, and on occasion in deliberate competition with it—let us not forget also the transplantation of many palatine and even bourgeois conventions and manners of dress and sumptuousity from Baghdad to Byzantium. The caliphal presence was often qualified as *muqaddas*, sacred, and called the Second Ka'ba; the Caliph's face, rarely seen except by his private entourage, was very often qualified as luminous, in line with the light symbolism of Late Antique kingship with its solar associations.

The Caliph's palatine compounds were often treated as safe havens for lives and treasures in times of trouble, and Caliph's tombs in Baghdad were often venerated. Other magical and typological motifs abounded plentifully, for the caliphate was also the custodian of holy relics: the chosen ceremonial color of the `Abbasid Caliphs, black, supposedly the Prophet's, was the color ceremonially worn by all public officials, and figured the Caliphate against the grain on their skin, with the difference that certain tissues were reserved for the Caliphs, as was red footwear. When Ibn Fadlān visited the Bulgars at the Volga Bend in the middle of the ninth century to forge an alliance against the Khazars, the Bulgar chief prostrated himself before the black cloak sent him from Baghdad, as did Saladin in Cairo more than three centuries later—just as they would, according to custom, have prostrated themselves before the Caliph's person, and just as Byzantines would have performed *proskynesis* before the imperial person and his icon. When in audience, the Caliphs from an uncertain and fairly late date would wear the Prophet Muhammad's Cloak (recently worn by Mullah Omar in Afghanistan—how it might have got to Central Asia I have no way of telling), and had beside them Muhammad's staff and before them the Koranic codex of `Uthman, the third Caliph in succession to Muhammad—the Prophet's standard only surfaced in the sixteenth century, having been bought by the Ottomans in a Damascus market, and was for the first time displayed during a military campaign in Hungary. Ground on which Caliphs sat was hallowed, and letters received from them were boiled and the revolting liquid drunk, as it brought the drinker the Caliph's *baraka*, the benign *Fortuna* he commanded which, unlike the Roman *fortuna augusti*, had no cultic structure. Indeed, the pleasure and justice of the Caliph caused prosperity and plenty, by magical means quite apart from socio-economic considerations.

The Caliphate is therefore an almost primordial office, inscribing itself in a universal history of typology, and this is where political theory and historical theology meet. Adam was, according to the Koran, God's first Caliph (*khalīfa*) on earth—his vicar, apostle, vice regent, legatee, and successor, if such could be conceived. The Baghdad Caliphs like those before them were God's Caliphs and Adam's figures as well as Caliphs of Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets who inaugurated the last, universal phase in the history of the world. This history was regarded by Muslims generally as a vast typological drama in which Muhammad recapitulates all previous prophecies and polities and restores them to the original and pristine condition of that primordial religion which is Islam (echoes here of a tradition identified with Origen and Eusebius, but also with Late Antique notions of a Perennial Philosophy).

It is in one particular consequence of this double capacity that the distinctiveness of this Muslim inflection of monotheistic kingship lies: Caliphs were, first of all, instances of mimesis of the divine in their constitutive and preservative capacities, and figures thereof, in the indivisible nature of their sovereignty. They are Caliphs of Muhammad in that they figure, in time, both his universalist historical enterprise and his election, which allows for the transmission of charisma through a dynastic line related to him by blood. Muslim Kingship in its Caliphal form represents God therefore at once directly and through the historical mediation of the Muhammadan fact—a fact both of historical theology and of dynastic genealogy. Unlike Byzantium, this is an election—and I remind you here of the *in vitro* unction of *porphyrogennetoi*—which does not involve the insinuation of the Holy Spirit into the bodies of unsuspecting empresses, although the mythological register takes a more ebullient form among the Fātimid Caliphs of Egypt and Syria (10th–12th centuries). They believed that members of their dynastic line had pre-existed the creation of the world, in spectral form in which they persisted until the arrival of the appointed time for their successive personal incarnations as Caliphs. The Twelver Shi'ites supposed that the seeds of their individual Imāms had been physically extracted from Adam's body by God before time itself was created.

Last but not least—and this, as a totalizing historical tendency, is the crux of the distinctiveness that I should like to convey to you, though in many disparate and unarticulated details many of its elements bear comparison with Byzantine kingship—the Caliphs were Muhammad's Caliphs in that they invigilated the application of his new dispensation, his *sharī'a*, which incidentally renders all thought of kings as *lex ani* -

mata inconceivable (except among the Fātimids). Muhammad is a universal historical figure not only because he completed the great universal cycle of prophecy, but because in so doing he at once absorbed and elevated prophetic history to its Adamic and Abrahamic beginnings.

I have said that the distinctiveness of the Caliphate within the possible structures of monotheistic kingship resided in the concomitance of both a direct and timeless relationship to God, and a relationship historically mediated through Muhammad, and that with respect to the latter, the Caliph was the guardian in his own time of Muhammad's dispensation. It was this last tendency that was accentuated with time, and most particularly with the extinction of the `Abbadids after seven hundred years of continuous rule of varying power and extent, with the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 and the execution of the last Caliph. This nomocratic trend had existed for a long time among pietistic and legalistic circles which were resistant to the sacral pretensions of the Caliphate.

Along with the rise of these circles into prominence as the Muslim priesthood—and I use the term “priesthood” advisedly, in a sociological and not in a sacramental sense, although Muslim priests are of course also involved in practices of magical healing and mediation between individual and God and indeed of a logocratic sacramentalism, the Word of God being to them the only authentic sacrament—this priesthood acquired a strong institutional consistency from around the twelfth century, when the central lands of Islam were overcome with secular kingship, with so-called sultanism, which granted considerable independence in matters of doctrine, including doctrines of legal order, to this priestly corporation, to this “sodality” in the Weberian sense of the term. One very important result was that the three components of classical Muslim enunciations of kingship diverged: while these had previously been sited as contiguous discourses in the same courtly milieu, they now took over different institutional sites, with the Sultans being given many of the worldly prerogatives of the Caliphate, and several of their metaphorical connections with divinity as well, in a form that was highly attenuated in comparison with what had been the Caliphs': they were shadows of God and preserving energies, but not in general sacred presences. The prerogative of figuring the Prophet and his monocratic dispensation, on the other hand, fell upon the priestly corporation, in conjunction with which the cult of the Prophet itself was royalized from the twelfth century onwards. With the displacement of Caliphal charisma to the priestly corporation and its endowment with the legalistic form of the *sharī'a*, came also the

displacement of this royalist charisma exclusively to the equally absent figure of the Prophet, wherein resided henceforth the Elementary Form of sacral kingship. And whereas previously the Caliphate was a technical legal distinction within the larger concept of kingship, kingship—sultanism—was now shorn of the mimetic and genealogical prerogatives of the Caliphate. What emerged discursively after this dispersion of royalist charisma was a genre of priestly writing on politics called *siyāsa sharʿiyya*, a form of legal and scripturalist writing on politics that came into its own in the thirteenth century, the outstanding European analogue to which is Bossuet's *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Ecriture Sainte* some four centuries later.

What I outlined just now resembles more or less the picture commonly held of Muslim public order and of its Levitical legalism. But this image—whose relation to reality is very complex—as I hope to have shown, was a development that required several centuries in order to detach itself from the heritage of Late Antique kingship, and, in the same movement, from sacral kingship itself, now transformed into a heathenish veneration of sheer sultanic power. It is this end-result which is probably most present to minds of readers today. Yet in all cases, a profound continuity persisted, and I can do no better than quote the great philosopher, theologian and astronomer Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī, advisor to Hülegü during the siege and sack of Baghdad in 1258, speaking of the person who directs the affairs of the world with divine support: “Such a person,” he said, “in the terminology of the Ancients, was called Absolute King [*al-mataʿ al-mutlaq*] ... the Moderns refer to him as the imam ... Plato calls him Regulator of the World [*al-mudabbir: oikonomos/hegemon*]”.⁵⁶

Notes

- ¹ A. M. Hocart, *Kingship*, Oxford, 1927, p. 7.
- ² E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London, 1915, pp. 423–4 and *passim*.
- ³ R. Caillouis, *L'Homme et le sacré*, Paris, 1950, p. 18.
- ⁴ M. Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return*, New York, 1955, p. 34.
- ⁵ J. Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, Paris, 1996, p. 74.
- ⁶ G. Ahn, “‘Monotheismus’—‘Polytheismus’. Grenzen und Möglichkeiten einer Klassifikation von Gottesvorstellungen,” in *Mesopotamica-Ugaritica-Biblica. Festschrift für Kurt Bergerhof* [Veröffentlichungen zur Kultur und Geschichte des Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments 232], ed. Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Lorentz, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1993, pp. 1–24, *passim*.
- ⁷ For the following, see W. A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970, pp. 9, 42, 46–7, 50 ff., 77, 251.
- ⁸ H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, Cambridge, Mass., 1948, pp. 12–3.
- ⁹ Martin Wallraff, *Christus versus Sol. Sonnenverehrung und Christentum in der Spätantike* [Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband 32], Münster, 2001.
- ¹⁰ J. Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 212 ff.
- ¹¹ G. F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Historians: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius* [Théologie Historique 46], Paris, 1977, pp. 134 ff., 144, 150.
- ¹² St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* [Loeb Classical Library 413], vi:5 ff.
- ¹³ F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy. Origins and Background*, Washington, D.C., 1966, pp. 73 ff.
- ¹⁴ *Works of the Emperor Julian* [Loeb Classical Library], vol. 3, tr. Wilmer Cave Wright, London and New York, 1913, p. 63.
- ¹⁵ J. Croissant, “Un nouveau Discours de Thémistius,” *Serta Leondiansa* XLIV (1930), p. 10.
- ¹⁶ A. Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire*, pp. 131 ff.
- ¹⁷ W. J. Malley, *Hellenism and Christianity. The Conflict between Hellenic and Christian Wisdom in the Contra Galileos of Julian the Apostate and the Contra Julianum of St. Cyril of Alexandria* [Analecta Gregoriana 210, Series Facultatis Theologiae, Sectio B, n. 68], Rome, 1978, pp. 76 ff., 203.
- ¹⁸ J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, Chicago, 1984, p. 12.
- ¹⁹ *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem*, Leipzig, 1935.
- ²⁰ G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, Princeton, 1993.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ²² One scholar has only noted similarities between Byzantine and Muslim notions relative to this and some related questions: A. Vasiliev, “Medieval Ideas of the End of the World: West and East,” *Byzantion* XVI/2 (1942–3), pp. 462–502. See in general G. Podskalsky, *Die Byzantinische Reichsideologie: Die Periodisierung der Weltgeschichte in den vier Grossreichen und dem tausend-jährigen Friedensreiche*, Munich, 1972.
- ²³ See for instance G. Bowersock, “Polytheism and Monotheism in Arabia and the Three Palestines,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* (1997), pp. 4 ff; Cameron, *Later Roman Empire*, 124 ff.

- ²⁴ Among others: H. Chadwick, "Introduction" to *Origen, Contra Celsum*, Cambridge, 1953, pp. xvii ff.; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, p. 51.
- ²⁵ Among others: T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, Cambridge, Mass., 1981, *passim*; Peterson, *Monotheismus*, pp. 66 ff.
- ²⁶ Peterson, *Monotheismus*, pp. 82 ff.
- ²⁷ St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, xviii:221.
- ²⁸ *Adv. Haer.*, iii:8, vii:1, and *passim*.
- ²⁹ *Polycraticus*, v:1.
- ³⁰ *De Monarchia*, i:9 f., ii:4 ff.
- ³¹ A. Cameron, *Later Roman Empire*, p. 137.
- ³² Chesnut, *The First Christian Historians*, p. 133.
- ³³ All material pertaining to Muslim discourses are derived from A. Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, London, 1997.
- ³⁴ Cf. Eusebius, in H. A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations* [University of California Publications: Classical Studies 15], Berkeley and Los Angeles, p. 87.
- ³⁵ G. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre*, Paris, 1996, p. 150.
- ³⁶ Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre*, p. 184.
- ³⁷ A. W. Ziegler, "Die byzantinische Religionspolitik und der sog. Cäsaropapismus," in *Festgabe für Paul Diels*, ed. E. Koschmieder, Munich, 1953, pp. 81–97, 93–4.
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- ³⁹ Among others, St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images. Three Apologies against Those who attack the Divine Images*, tr. David Anderson, Crestwood, 1980, *passim*.
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Index of Subjects

- Abbasids, 43, 53, 57, 58, 147, 152,
 189, 200, 217, 219, 230, 242, 245,
 247, 281
 Abbasid Caliphate, 57, 58, 245
 Abraham, 30, 71, 73, 122, 127, 155,
 177
 absolutism, absolutist, 213, 216, 218,
 227, 276, 277, 279, 282
 acephalic community, 231, 233
 Achaemenian, 57
ad fontes, 194, 195
adab, 230
 Adam, 29, 30, 31, 68, 70, 71, 73, 78,
 142, 147, 155, 156, 172, 176, 192,
 225, 226, 284
 Adonai, 272
 Adonisian myth, 31, 72
aedil (see *muhtasib*), 241
 Aeneas, 127
 aesthetic spirit, 9, 48
agoranomos (see *muhtasib*), 241
ahl al-hadith, 230
ahl al-hall wa'l-'aqd (*potestas ligan-*
di et solvendi), 250
 al-'Aliy, 272
 alchemy, 87
 Allāh, 105
 allegory, allegorical interpretation,
 29, 32, 57, 73, 120, 123, 126, 140,
 167, 279
 Almohad Empire, 241
amīr al-hajj, 221
al-amr bi'l ma'rūf wa'l-nahy 'an al-
munkar, 240
 Anabaptists, 200
 anachronism, 15, 193, 198, 199, 205,
 224, 270
 analogy, 81, 83, 85, 86, 91, 97, 116,
 117, 262, 269, 273, 277, 282
 angels, 31, 71, 72, 154, 155, 156, 177,
 178
 Anglo-Saxon England, 271
Annales, xii, 14
 annals, 27
ante legem, 236
 anthropological constants, 42
 anthropomorphism, anthropomorphic,
 40, 45, 57, 164, 167, 176
 Antichrist, 30, 72, 145, 155
 anti-Enlightenment discourse, 6, 8,
 11, 13
 Antioch, Antiochene, 59, 103, 155
 Antonines, 276
 apocalypse, 29, 41, 70, 139, 147, 148,
 149, 150, 156, 158, 163, 164, 167
 apocalypticism, Jewish, 162
 apocrypha, apocryphal, 108, 115, 195
 apologetics, 163
 apostle, apostolate, 4, 115, 179, 248,
 267, 269, 274, 284
 Arab Christians, 31, 73
 Arab conquests, 57, 104, 211, 212
 Arab traditions, 211
 Arab tribalism, 211
 Arabian peninsula, xii, 58, 281
 Arabic, xv, xvii, xviii, 17, 22, 27, 28,
 30, 60, 67, 85, 87, 104, 105, 112,
 114, 121, 123, 149, 172, 191, 206,
 209, 210, 212, 241, 247, 251, 252,
 253, 275, 281
 Arabic civilization, 27, 187
 Arabic culture, x, 194
 Arabic historiography, historical

- discourse, historical writing, xv, 5, 16, 26, 27, 37, 69, 93, 104, 237
- Arabic language, 60, 105, 123, 149, 172, 206, 209, 210, 251, 252, 253, 281
- Arabic literature, 28, 68, 74, 239
- Arabic philosophy, 21, 237, 264
- Arabic traditions, 29, 68
- Arabs, 21, 25, 44, 57, 210, 211, 229
- Arameans, 57
- archetypal events, 76
- archetype(s), 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 68, 70, 72, 74, 77, 78, 79, 81, 83, 88, 92, 113, 238
- Ark of the Covenant, 155
- asbāb al-nuzūl*, 194
- ‘Ashūrā, 31, 72
- asl*, pl. *usl*, 78, 79, 80, 112, 116, 117, 253
- Assyrians, 268
- Athens, 49, 59, 102, 268
- Athens, Periclean, 49
- Authenticity, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 39, 111, 123, 211, 229, 231
- authority, 32, 67, 68, 77, 83, 84, 86, 87, 88, 89, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 113, 115, 118, 119, 123, 126, 143, 153, 164, 189, 197, 207, 208, 209, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 224, 225, 228, 232, 243, 244, 245, 246, 248, 264, 271, 272
- authority, clerico-juristic, 84, 86, 90
- authority, legal, 83
- authority, royal, 214
- authority, scriptural, 77
- Autocrator, 277
- awā’il*, 68, 69
- Ayyubids, 143, 245
- al-Azhar, 166
- al-‘Azīz, 272
- Ba‘l, 273
- Babylon, 19, 274, 277
- Badr (Battle of), 31, 32, 72, 73, 154, 155
- Baghdad, 144, 145, 174, 208, 213, 221, 233, 245, 270, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286
- Bakr, 212
- barā’ a asliyya*, 236, 251
- Baraka*, 283
- Basileus*, 214, 270, 278, 280
- bay‘a*, 154
- Beast of the Apocalypse (*al-dābba*), the, 156, 164
- Beatific Vision, the, 167, 176
- Beginning(s), 4, 18, 21, 22, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 40, 47, 50, 53, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 79, 139, 146, 149, 150, 156, 158, 173, 177, 188, 192, 193, 194, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 225, 229, 231, 247, 248, 267, 285
- Bible, 54, 102, 106, 114, 123, 193, 214, 217,
- Bible criticism, 114, 123
- Bibliolatry, 194
- biographical dictionaries, 27
- Book of Daniel, The*, 41, 148
- Boulê*, 59
- Brahminism, 109
- Bulgar, Bulgars, 218, 245, 283
- al-Burāq, 164
- Byzantine, xii, 27, 58, 154, 156, 191, 208, 214, 217, 223, 226, 229, 250, 270, 273, 274, 276, 277, 283, 284, 287
- Byzantine emperors, 218, 270, 277, 279
- Byzantine persecutions, 251
- Byzantium, 44, 57, 101, 245, 250, 283, 284
- Caesarism, 280
- Caesaropapism, 279
- Caliph, Caliphs (*khalīfa*), 32, 52, 53, 87, 143, 147, 154, 168, 201, 212, 214, 218, 226, 230, 233, 243, 242, 244, 245, 246, 247, 250, 252, 270, 282, 283, 284, 285
- caliphal ideology, imperial, 219
- caliphal monarchy, 209

- Caliphate, the, xvi, 49, 57, 58,
 104, 115, 190, 198, 201, 208, 218,
 219, 221, 223, 224, 226, 227, 236,
 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 250,
 252, 253, 263, 276, 281, 282, 283,
 284, 285, 286
 Caliphism, 214
 Camel (Battle of the), 151
 canon law, 88, 89
 canon, Muslim, xv, 28, 78, 101, 102,
 103, 108, 117, 121, 125, 195, 196,
 197, 198, 229, 243, 281
 Canonical pragmatics, 113
 Canonicity, 107, 108, 111, 112, 115,
 116, 118, 127
 Cappadocian Fathers, 273
 Carcassonne, 281
 Carolingian coronation ceremonies,
 270
 Carthage, 56
 Casuistics, 113
 categorical fallacy, 249
 categorization, historical, xvi, 41, 44,
 61, 208, 249
 Cathars, 76
 Catholic Inquisition – 251
 Catholicism, 115
 causality, xvi, 32, 44, 55, 69, 79, 80,
 81, 82, 96, 115, 117, 139, 140,
 276
 causality, historical, xvi, 55, 201,
 205
 causality, legal, 79
 ceremonial, 89, 108, 167, 208, 244,
 269, 270, 278, 282, 283
 Cherub, 178
 Chiliasm, 140
 China, 44, 46, 237
 Christianity, xii, 32, 70, 73, 125, 195,
 213, 225, 253, 273, 277
 Christians, 31, 72, 73, 105, 237, 274,
 278
Christomimesis, 32, 73, 209, 278
 chronic time of history, 4
 chronicles, 27, 77
 chronography, 4, 15, 142, 151, 153,
 157
 chronological measure, 149
 chronometry, chronometric time, 5,
 15, 32, 69, 74, 75, 83, 88, 107,
 141, 142
 Chronos, 274
 chronotopos, chronotopoi, 187, 188,
 201
 Church, 51, 139, 235, 272, 279
 Church Councils, 229
 Church Fathers, 73, 208, 272, 277
 civilization(s), x, xi, xii, xiii, 4, 5, 6,
 9, 21, 27, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46,
 47, 48, 50, 51, 52, 56, 57, 60, 68,
 139, 187, 191, 204, 207, 220, 270
 civilization, Islamic, xv, 43, 56,
 57, 61, 68, 86, 187, 203, 204
 clerical establishment, Muslim, 67
 clerico-legal institution, 86, 90
 climatic phenomena, 152
 codex, 283
 cognitive relativism, 7
 commentaries, 119, 195, 196, 236
 communitarianism, 219, 241
 comparative classification, 54
 comparativism, xv, 10, 12, 16, 41, 42,
 188, 203, 250, 280
concordia discordantium canonum,
 232
 consensus, *ijmāʿ*, 78, 109, 173, 232
 Constantinople, 145, 147, 153, 155,
 157, 218, 250, 270, 278, 280, 281,
 283
 constructivism, 5
 consubstantiality, 193, 267, 277
 continuity, xii, xv, 6, 8, 9, 18, 19, 22,
 26, 27, 32, 41, 43, 45, 47, 48, 49,
 56, 58, 74, 75, 83, 90, 102, 109,
 117, 119, 139, 142, 143, 148, 175,
 189, 190, 198, 205, 212, 223, 229,
 245, 272, 286
 continuity, generic, 28, 30, 41, 68,
 72
 continuity, historical, 23, 26, 45,
 102
 contract, typological – 28, 55, 68, 241
 corporatism, 42, 55, 59, 60

- corruption, x, xi, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24,
 73, 153, 220
 cosmocracy, 274
 cosmocrator, 277, 279
 Council of Chalcedon, 278
Craeft, 272
 Creation, 29, 30, 31, 70, 72, 77, 92,
 122, 149, 197, 225, 226, 282, 284
 Crusaders, 21, 51, 279
 cultic memory, 29, 70, 71, 76, 77
 cults, imperial, 274
 culture, culturalism, x, xii, 4, 6, 7, 8,
 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 26, 27, 28,
 29, 33, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48,
 50, 52, 68, 71, 76, 120, 124, 126,
 139, 167, 170, 188, 193, 194, 199,
 201, 202, 203, 205, 207, 213, 217,
 218, 219, 228, 242, 254, 279, 281,
 282,
 cultural patterns, 39, 55, 202
 cultural system, 10
 culturalist contrastive histories, 56
 culturalist determinism – 7, 11
 culturalist differentialism, 8
 culturalist historiography, 249
 culture-morphological patterns –
 44, 170,

al-dahr (= Aion), 149, 157, 158
al-Dajjāl (= Anti-Christ), 153, 155,
 156
 Damascus, 59, 143, 145, 153, 154,
 155, 200, 213, 281, 283
dawla, 208, 209, 252
 Day of Atonement, 31, 73
 decadence, xi, 18, 44, 48, 50, 51, 54
 decline, 54, 55, 139, 144, 152, 158,
 187, 188, 189, 200, 201, 202, 216,
 219, 230, 248
 decline, trope of, 256
 degradation, 22, 122
 Deluge, 30, 72, 271
 Destiny, 49, 74
 determination, generic, 32, 76
 determinism, deterministic, 7, 11, 15,
 47, 77, 140, 201, 202
dharma, 78, 238

Dhikr, 105
 Diachronic, 41, 69, 188, 203
 discontinuity, historical – xvi, 41, 74,
 discourse, historical, 4, 5, 16, 26, 32,
 42, 74, 203
 discourse, legal, xvi, 78, 86, 87, 236,
 243
 divine accommodation, 121
 divinity, notions of, 54, 271
diwān, 212
 dogmatic discourse, general theory
 of, 68
 doxography, 229, 243
 duration, 4, 5, 13, 14, 15, 24, 28, 69,
 149, 150, 199
 dynasty, dynasticism, 69, 152, 209,
 210, 253

 early Christian dogmas, 229
 Ecclesiology, xiii, 200
 ecumenism, 58, 59
 ecumenism, imperial, 217, 245
 egalitarianism, 211, 231
 Egypt, 124, 126, 127, 128, 144, 154,
 214, 267, 274, 284
eikon theon, 273
Einfühlung, 11
Ekklésia, 192
 El, 273
El Elyon, 272
 Emanation, 268, 269, 277, 278
 Emessa, 59, 105
 emperors, Roman, 59, 268, 274, 275
 empire, imperialism, xi, 17, 20, 21,
 26, 40, 41, 43, 48, 56, 57, 59, 145,
 148, 190, 192, 208, 209, 210, 216,
 217, 219, 224, 241, 242, 245, 250,
 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 280, 281
 empires and dynasties, Muslim, 192,
 210, 216, 244, 245, 248
 Enlightenment, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15,
 53
 Entelechy, 9, 21, 22, 26
Enuma Elish, 282
 Epic, 14, 44, 199
 epiphany, *epiphaneia*, 32, 73, 267,
 268, 276

- epistemology, epistemological
 probabilism, 5, 11, 24, 83, 84, 86,
 111, 113
- Erotic literature, Arabic, 166
- eschatology, eschatological Signs, xv,
 31, 72, 77, 139, 140, 141, 143,
 144, 145, 146, 147, 150, 153, 158,
 167, 226
- eschatology, proleptic, 32, 73, 146
- essence, x, xi, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18,
 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 32, 48, 51, 56,
 105
- essentialism, essentialist, 7, 11, 15,
 16, 17, 33
- eternity, 4, 14, 15, 32, 54, 73, 74, 107,
 116, 141, 149, 171
- eternity, chronographic – 141
- ethnology, ethnological classification,
 8, 202, 203
- ethos, Promethean, 9
- Euphrates, 154, 156
- Eurasia, 268
- Euro-Christian civilization, 191
- Eve, 29, 71, 192, 225
- event, historical, 57
- events, inaugural, 69
- evolutionism, 10, 28, 68, 125
- exceptionalism, x, 42, 47, 190, 192,
 249
- exegesis, 51, 67, 81, 88, 113, 120,
 124, 125, 167, 168, 197, 244, 253,
 277
- exempla*, 28, 76, 112, 213
- exoticism, 102, 190, 205
- Face of God, 176
- Fall, the, 29, 70, 225
- far'*, pl. *furū'*, 79, 117, 118
- fasād al-zamān*, 153, 220
- Fātimid, Fatimids, 43, 53, 152, 284,
 285
- Feudalism, 60
- figura Christi*, 32, 73
- figure – 29, 32, 49, 115, 116, 117,
 279,
- figure of Christ, royal, 163, 225,
 filiation, 80, 81, 83, 84, 87, 88, 89,
 116, 118, 198, 271
- fiqh*, 108, 166, 193, 238, 240
- al-fitra*, 251, 120, 121
- Fortuna*, 283
- fortuna augusti*, 283
- foundationalism, 6
- Four World-empires, 148
- Frea*, 272
- French Revolution, 6, 21, 33
- fundamentalism, fundamentalist, 9,
 33, 40, 51, 118, 121, 122, 124,
 126, 186, 190, 192, 193, 194, 195,
 197, 203
- Furqān*, 105
- Fürstenspiegel*, 28, 67, 76, 77, 189,
 90, 214, 239, 240, 246, 252, 282
- future, 3, 23, 30, 33, 72, 77, 127, 140,
 141, 142, 146, 147, 148, 149, 151,
 158, 159, 192, 228
- Gabriel, Archangel, 87, 104, 155
- Ganymedes, 173
- Geist*, x, 5, 10, 75
- genealogy, 8, 15, 32, 54, 56, 76, 87,
 92, 113, 115, 211, 213, 242, 248,
 250, 269, 284
- genealogical telescoping, 45
- geometry, 75
- Geonim, 262
- Germanic kings, 271
- Ghaznavids, 245
- Giftstol*, 272
- Gladius*, 223
- Glosses, 47, 119, 195, 199
- Gnosticism, 246
- God, 3, 4, 15, 18, 29, 31, 52, 68, 70,
 71, 72, 73, 78, 80, 81, 104, 105,
 108, 115, 122, 123, 129, 140, 149,
 155, 156, 158, 159, 164, 165, 169,
 172, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 197,
 209, 212, 214, 215, 219, 223, 225,
 226, 227, 234, 237, 240, 246, 247,
 251, 263, 267, 269, 270, 272, 273,
 277, 278, 279, 282, 284, 285
- gods, 28, 30, 45, 68, 268, 269, 272,
 275

- Gog and Magog, 30, 72, 153, 156
 Golden Age, 25, 33
 Golgotha, 156
 Goliath, 31, 72
 Grace, 225, 270, 272
Grammatikoi, 230
 grand narratives, 10, 13, 14
 Great Mosque in Damascus, 155
 Greece, 17, 18, 49, 56, 58
 Greek myths of creation, 282
- Habitus*, 88
hadīth, 28, 78, 80, 81, 88, 104, 108,
 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 119,
 121, 122, 123, 141, 142, 143, 144,
 145, 146, 148, 152, 167, 168, 176,
 195, 197, 213, 232, 250
hadīth qudsī, 104
 Hagar, 71
Hawā, 165
Heilsgeschichte, 15, 73, 107, 115, 226
 Helios, 275
 Hell, 30, 72, 144, 154, 155, 167, 168,
 169, 170
 Hellenic Society, 57, 58
 Hellenism, 40, 49, 57, 58, 203
 Hephaestus, 30
 Hera, 30
 Heresiographers, 221
 hermeneutics, legal, 84, 85, 117
 Hermes, 30, 87
hikma, 230
hirāba (sedition), 251
hisba, 234, 241, 264
 historical categorization, xvi, 41, 44,
 61, 208, 249
 historical individuality, 7, 8, 17, 40,
 54
 historical influence, 16
 historical cycles, 29
 historical mass, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,
 15, 43, 46, 48, 49, 61, 139
 historical periodization, 202
 historical succession, 13, 70
 historicism, 5, 6, 48, 53, 120
 historicity, 8, 9, 12, 15, 21, 27, 48,
 103, 107, 110, 119, 122, 125, 129,
 148, 151
 histories, universal, 27, 67
 historiography, nationalist, 15, 26
 historism, xi, 53, 57
 history of Islam, 142, 148, 151, 201
 history of religions, 54, 102, 109,
 155, 193, 206, 222, 258, 271
 history of the future, 30, 72, 77, 140,
 142, 146, 164
 history, dynastic, 27
 history, modern Arab conceptions of,
 xv, 26
 history, salvation, 26, 29, 67, 70, 74,
 76, 77, 139, 140, 155, 209, 228,
 277
 history, scientific, 4, 12
 history, theology of, 228, 277, 279
 history, typological, 54, 58, 102, 142,
 147
hiyal, 91
 Hobbesian, 215, 216, 226
 holy relics, 195, 283
 Holy Spirit, the, 232, 275, 277, 278,
 284
homo islamicus, 249
 Horus, 274
 Hubal, 105
hukm, 79
 human interest, 78, 81, 82, 91, 117,
 118, 120, 125, 125, 126, 236
 human sociality, 227, 236, 267
 Hungary, 283
huris, 166, 169, 173, 174, 175, 177,
 178, 179, 182
 Husain, Passion of, 31, 73
- ‘ibar*, sg. *‘ibra*, 112
 icon, 247, 273, 274, 275, 278, 279,
 283
 ideas, innate, 11
 identity, xvi, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 25, 28,
 29, 39, 40, 52, 69, 70, 75, 77, 83,
 86, 88, 92, 154, 192, 203, 206,
 212, 254, 267, 269
 ideology, ix, 10, 18, 25, 43, 206, 218,
 219, 224, 244

- Idrīs-Hermes, 87
i'jāz, 129
ijāza, 232
Iliad, 28
 'Īlīyā' (Aelea), 147
 'illa, pl. 'ilal, 81, 82, 83, 84, 91, 117
 Imam, Imams, 189, 226, 227, 286
imārat al-istilā', 245
 imperial (see also Empire), 40, 41,
 43, 58, 59, 60, 189, 192, 207, 208,
 211, 213, 217, 218, 219, 221, 223,
 231, 245, 256, 262, 268, 270, 273,
 274, 277, 278, 279, 280, 283
 inauguration, 28, 29, 75
 incommensurability, 10, 39, 188, 204
 indices (*amārāt*, *amāra*), indices of
 correlation, 82, 83, 84, 89, 91
 inference, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89,
 118, 203, 214
 instinctivism, 11
interpretatio Christiana, 213
interpretatio Islamica, 213
 interpretation, historical, 81, 119, 120
 interpretation, typological, 31, 73, 74
 intuitionism, 11
irāda amrīya, 92
irāda qadariya, 92
 Iran, 58, 110, 145, 222
 Iranian gods and kings, 272
 Iraq, 144, 152
 Isaac, 122
 Ishmael, 71
 'ishq, 165
 Islam, ix, x, xi, xii, xiii, xv, xvii, 4, 7,
 8, 16, 18, 21, 25, 28, 30, 31, 39,
 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49,
 51, 52, 53, 54, 57, 58, 59, 60, 70,
 71, 72, 80, 90, 101, 111, 112, 114,
 115, 119, 120, 121, 124, 125, 126,
 127, 139, 142, 144, 148, 151, 155,
 157, 158, 188, 190, 191, 192, 193,
 195, 196, 197, 200, 201, 202, 203,
 204, 205, 207, 211, 212, 215, 217,
 220, 223, 224, 225, 228, 229, 233,
 235, 247, 249, 251, 253, 256, 270,
 280, 281, 284, 285
 Islamization, 127, 211, 260
 Ismā'ili, Ismā'ilism, 70, 93, 189, 211,
isnād, 110, 114
 Israelites, 31, 51, 72, 145, 150, 155,
 262, 276, 279
 Isrāfil (Archangel), 156
 Istanbul, 19, 20, 157
istihsān, 91, 92
istishāb, 91
ius civile, 78
ius gentium, 78
 Jerusalem, 125, 147, 152, 154, 155
 Jesuits, 120
 Jews, 31, 72, 73, 155, 274
jihād, 32, 73, 240
jinn, 87, 122, 123, 272
 Judaeo-Christian, xii, 51, 101
 Judaeo-Muslim God, 81
 Judaism, xii, 109, 125, 193, 195, 265
 judgment, 39, 51, 54, 79, 80, 81, 83,
 90, 91, 110, 116, 122
 judgment, legal, 79, 81, 91
 jurisprudence, 78, 79, 80, 82, 84, 85,
 112, 116, 117, 193, 196, 224, 236,
 238, 239, 240, 243, 244, 248
 jurisprudence, Islamic, 77, 85, 86
 Ka'ba, 179
kaiser-i Rum, 157
kāliyūgā, 163
 Karaite polemics, 114, 115
khabar, pl. *akhbār*, 110, 114
 Kharijites, 189, 211, 212, 231, 242
 King of Kings, 273
 kings, 31, 67, 68, 72, 171, 214, 218,
 234, 246, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272,
 278, 280, 282, 284
 kings, veterotestamental, 279
 kingship, xiii, xvi, 32, 59, 73, 74, 140,
 145, 156, 198, 201, 211, 213, 214,
 215, 217, 224, 225, 246, 267, 269,
 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 276, 277,
 280, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286
 kingship, Hellenistic theories of,
 237
 kingship, Muslim, 198, 246, 268,
 270, 280, 284

- kingship, sacral, 213, 230, 247,
 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 280, 281,
 286
Kitāb, 105
 Koran, 18, 31, 49, 53, 54, 72, 73, 77,
 78, 80, 81, 89, 101, 102, 103, 104,
 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111,
 112, 113, 114, 119, 121, 122, 123,
 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 144,
 147, 172, 177, 191, 193, 194, 195,
 196, 197, 202, 207, 211, 217, 219,
 229, 232, 233, 251, 272, 281, 284
 Koranic exegesis, 67, 113, 133, 168,
 244, 253
 Koranic text, 101, 103, 104, 106, 108,
 124, 128, 129, 170, 195
Kräfte, 8, 9, 20
Kultur, 6
Kulturkreise, 43, 38

 language, political, 191
 Last Emperor, 156
 Late Antique royalism, 247
 Late Antiquity, xii, xvi, 48, 58, 59,
 60, 61, 101, 105, 148, 188, 192,
 213, 247, 250, 260, 271, 272, 275,
 280, 281
 Lebanon, 222
Lebensphilosophie, 11, 24
 legal theory, Islamic (*usūl al-fiqh*)
 and Muslim, 67, 78, 86, 90, 243
 legitimacy, 226, 227, 228, 229, 242,
 245, 246
 legitimism, 209, 228
lex animata, 273
 liberation theology, 23
 library of Alexandria, 52
 linguistic turn, the, 4
 literalism, 128, 220, 252
 liturgical, 105, 225
longue durée, 14, 58, 116, 275
 Lucifer, 68, 69
 Lydda, 155

Maegan, 272
 Maghreb, 152, 154
 magical, 5, 87, 107, 115, 195, 201,
 223, 232, 247, 262, 269, 274, 277,
 278, 279, 283, 285
 Mahdī (the Messiah), 30, 72, 142,
 147, 150, 153, 154, 156, 157
mala', 59
Malāhim, 145
malik (see king, kingship), 214
 Manichaean, xiii, 147
 Marduk, 274
maslaha mursala, 126
mazālim, 238
 meaning, concept of, 10, 12
 Mecca, 30, 59, 71, 105, 122, 152,
 154, 155, 213
 medieval Arab geography, 157
 medieval Arab historical writing, xv,
 16, 27, 29-30, 37, 74, 208
 medieval Arab semantic theory, 79
 medieval European political thought,
 190, 216, 259
 medieval Latin political thought, 191,
 208, 217
 Medina, 145, 155, 189, 200, 213
 Medianan caliphate, 104
 Mediterranean, xiii, 60, 208
 memory, 13, 15, 29, 40, 46, 60, 70,
 71, 76, 77, 203, 213
 Mesmerism, 124
 Messianism, 140, 145, 229, 250
 meta-historical, 240
 meta-historical taxonomy, 48
 meteorological phenomena, 152
metis, 10
 metec intelligence, 85, 239
 Michael (Archangel), 155
 Middle Ages, 25, 53, 55, 98, 101, 112,
 123, 239, 262, 271, 273, 275, 280
Mihna, 251
al-mihna, 219, 251
miht, 272
 mimetic capacity, 209
 mimetic postulate, 12
 mimetic strategies, 267
mirabilia, 147, 156
Mishnāh, 109
 Mithras, 275, 276
al-mushaf, 105

- modern, modernism, modernist, ix, x, xi, xii, xv, 16, 18, 22, 25, 26, 27, 33, 51, 68, 78, 79, 90, 97, 99, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 114, 117, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 130, 163, 185, 187, 188, 190, 191, 192, 195, 196, 203, 205, 212, 214, 234, 237, 238, 251, 255, 256, 268
- monarchia*, monarchical state, monarchy (see kingship), 189, 198, 208, 209, 210, 214, 217, 218, 225, 226, 229, 246, 248, 272, 274, 277, 282
monarchy, monotheistic, 250, 280
- Mongols, 21, 152, 285
- Monophysite, 57
- monotheism, 19, 29, 30, 67, 71, 78, 115, 125, 149, 213, 271, 272, 273, 276, 281
- Moscow, 41, 279
- Moses, 32, 73, 155, 177, 228, 273
- motifemes, 89
- motifs, 4, 44, 118, 199, 229, 269, 283
- Mount Sinai, 155
- Mu‘tazilities, 81
- Mudar, 212
- Mughals, 190, 253
- Muhammadan, 28, 29, 31, 70, 72, 78, 81, 94, 103, 104, 106, 109, 115, 129, 141, 146, 147, 163, 168, 202, 227, 247, 284
- Muhtasib*, 241
- mulk*, 214 (see also: kingship)
- Mutawātir*, 110
- myths, x, xi, xii, 45, 68, 87, 92, 162, 169, 213, 225, 226, 262, 282
- name, naming, x, xi, 7, 25, 26, 40, 41, 61, 76, 90, 127, 207, 211, 249
- naqīb al-ashraf*, 221,
- narrative, narrative structure, 5, 10, 12, 14, 27, 30, 51, 68, 74, 76, 87, 104, 105, 110, 111, 114, 120, 121, 122, 128, 145, 146, 148, 150, 167, 168, 170, 171, 172, 186, 187, 200, 202, 205, 225, 231, 233, 248
narrative, historical, 13, 189, 199, 201, 204, 249
- narrativist, narrativist analysis, narrativity, 4, 12, 13
- naskh*, 80, 112, 195
- nass*, 80
- nation, nationalism, 5, 6, 8, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 43, 44, 177, 212, 217, 232, 253
- natural law, 91, 120, 125, 236
- nature, ix, xi, 4, 6, 8, 9, 18, 20, 22, 23, 26, 53, 75, 78, 79, 80, 84, 86, 87, 88, 92, 107, 110, 111, 121, 123, 125, 142, 144, 151, 165, 168, 172, 188, 189, 195, 196, 215, 220, 227, 228, 234, 235, 239, 240, 248, 279, 282, 284
- neo-conservatism, 204
- neo-Kantians, 14
- neo-Platonism, 34, 59, 229, 246, 273
- neo-traditionalism, 193, 203, 238
- New Testament, 73, 80, 115, 214, 215, 225, 281
- Noah, 155, 271
- Noah’s Ark, 31, 32, 73, 139, 279
- nomocratic, nomocracy, 235, 285
- nomos*, 78, 238
- nomos empsychos*, 273, 274
- nomothetic text, 78
- norma normans*, 239
- norma normata*, 239
- Normans, 56
- North Africa, x, 139, 241, 250
- nubuwwa*, 156
- Occident, xvi, 4, 56, 59
- oecumenical unity, 59
- Old Testament, 73, 88, 105, 236, 272, 282
- Olympians, 173
- opinio communis doctorum*, 78, 112
- order, problem of, 226, 248
- organism, organismic, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, 14, 20, 26, 27, 33, 44, 45, 54, 57, 215
- Orient, the, xi, xvi, 4, 57, 59, 270
- Orientalism, Orientalist, x, xi, xvi, xvii, 12, 18, 40, 47, 49, 50, 59, 102, 106, 201, 204, 205, 273

- Orientalism of the late Roman empire, 59
 origin(s), xi, xii, xiii, xv, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 31, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 68, 70, 72, 86, 87, 90, 92, 105, 114, 115, 118, 126, 127, 129, 139, 158, 188, 189, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 207, 210, 211, 212, 216, 225, 228, 229, 231
 Orthodoxy, 270, 279
 Ottoman, Ottomans, 17, 19, 20, 21, 26, 43, 53, 145, 157, 190, 222, 251, 253, 257, 280, 283
 Pahlavi, 247
 palaeo-Islamic, 144, 147, 151, 281
 Palmyra, 59, 241
 Panbasilea, 210
 Pandora, 30
 Pantocrator, 215, 225, 272, 277
 Paraclete, 115
 Paradise, 30, 70, 72, 154, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179
 Parousia, 153, 268
 Patricians, 59, 221, 223
 Patrimonialism, 216, 218, 224
 Patristic, 120, 193, 214, 277
 Patristic Christianity, 32, 73
 pattern, cultural, 39, 55, 202, 207
pax augusti, 276, 279
 Pen, God's, 29, 70, 149, 166
 Pentateuch, 114, 115
 Perennial Philosophy (*philosophia perennis*) 87, 284
 Peripateticism, 87
 Persia, Persians, 49, 56, 57, 152, 189, 246
 Perspectivism, 14
 Philology, 106, 120, 206, 255
 philosophers, Muslim, 190, 253
 phrenology, 84
 pietism, pietists, x, 5, 120, 148, 213, 220, 221, 222, 224, 227
 pleasure, rhetoric of, 168, 170
 poetics, historical, 5
 political thought, Islamic, xvi, 37, 185-261
 polysemy, 88, 107
 polytheism, 271, 276, 281
pontifex, 227
 pontifical authority, 115, 185, 234, 247, 273, 280
 populism, 17
porphyrogenetoi, 278, 284
 Poseidon, 274
 positivism, 195
 post-colonial, 4, 5, 10, 23, 42
 post-modern, post-modernism, post-modernist, 4, 7, 10, 12, 13, 23, 26, 27, 33, 35, 39
praefiguratio ecclesiae, 32, 73
 pragmatics of reception, 42, 196
 prefiguration(s), 27, 32, 51, 54, 73, 74, 75, 125
 priesthood, priestly sodality, 91, 112, 222, 223, 267, 285
princes, 227
 privation, 9, 22, 23, 24, 26, 48, 77, 171, 173
 prophecy, 29, 30, 31, 32, 70, 71, 72, 109, 116, 125, 141, 142, 144, 146, 147, 148, 149, 151, 152, 154, 155, 156, 157, 209, 223, 226, 248, 253, 267, 282, 285
 prophetology, Muslim, 109
proskynesis, 283
 Providence, 32, 74
 provincial law, Roman, 211
 Ptolemys, 274
 Punic wars, 56, 140
Qabbalāh, 114
 al-Qā'im, 142, 250, 251
qat', 83
qirā'āt, 107
qiyās, 81, 83, 116
qudwa (uswa), 112
 Queen of Sheba, 68, 124
 Quraish, 212
 Qarmatī, 152

- Rabb*, 105
Ra`, 274
 Rabbinate, 222, 262, 264
 Rabbinical Judaism
 Rabbinism, 109, 265
 Rabbis, 115
Rabī a, 212
 race, 6, 39, 43, 57
 race, Semitic, 54
 racism, 5
 al-Rahmān, 105, 178
ratio legis, 83, 116, 236
 Ravenna, 218
 reading, techniques of, 194, 206, 255
 reason, 6, 11, 39, 42, 78, 81, 83, 92,
 120, 121, 125, 201, 202, 273
 reason, historical, xvii, 33, 40, 44
 recommencements, 27
 recursivity, 29, 31, 73
 re-enactment, 29, 56, 69, 70, 75, 77,
 79, 86, 87, 92, 116, 117, 118, 122,
 139, 144, 158, 279
 reform, reformism, reformists,
 Muslim, 19, 117, 121, 123, 125,
 223
 Reformation, the, 193, 194, 195
regnum, 223, 280
 relativism, 7
 religion(s), x, xiii, 6, 16, 19, 30, 42,
 44, 50, 52, 54, 55, 56, 92, 101,
 102, 109, 120, 121, 125, 126, 127,
 128, 155, 185, 189, 190, 191, 192,
 193, 197, 199, 201, 206, 207, 208,
 222, 225, 230, 234, 235, 238, 241,
 246, 262, 264, 271, 273, 274, 276,
 284
 religion, Muslim, xi, xvi, 48, 201,
 213
 religion, primeval, 71
 religion, Roman, 273, 274
 religion, scripturalisation of, 193
 repetition, historical, 15, 27, 28, 29,
 32, 49, 54, 58, 69, 79, 86, 88, 89,
 108, 117, 118, 139, 140, 144, 200,
 205, 278
 repetition, typological, 32, 55, 56,
 118
 republicanism, 59
 resurrection, 31, 73, 154, 156, 164
 revivalism, revivalist, 13, 15, 17, 18,
 19, 21, 22, 33, 139, 241
 rhetoric, 173, 175, 206, 208, 217, 236
 rhythm(s), historical, 9, 26, 28-29,
 56-57, 70, 75, 149
 Riemannian geometry, 75
risāla, 155
 rise and fall, xi, 9
 ritual, 30, 69, 72, 75, 77, 82, 89, 92,
 107, 109, 117, 118, 141, 146, 166,
 195, 198, 206, 217, 232, 251, 269,
 276, 278, 279
Romanitas, 218
 Romanity, imperial, 279
 Romano-Germanic history, 54
 romantic, romanticism, xi, 5, 9, 11,
 13, 17, 19, 20, 25, 26, 27, 33, 43,
 53, 54, 139, 202, 203, 205, 261
 Rome, 41, 49, 50, 56, 105, 153, 155,
 219, 250, 256, 268, 173, 275, 276,
 277, 279
 Romulus, 59, 274
 Royalty, 154, 208, 214, 216, 274
 royalty, sacerdotal, 278
 Russian Revolution, 33

 Sabeans, 31, 72
sacerdotium, 223, 280
 sacrality, 268, 279, 280
 sacred, xiii, 28, 29, 70, 75, 76, 88,
 143, 157, 218, 233, 270, 275, 283,
 285
 sacred history, 75
 sacred, the, 31, 69, 71, 73, 74,
 268, 269, 272
 Safavids, 145, 152, 190, 222
 Salafism, *salafiyya*, 121, 122, 127
 Saljuqs, 245, 270
 salvation, 29, 67, 70, 74, 76, 77, 120,
 139, 140, 142, 144, 151, 154, 155,
 195, 209, 227, 228, 242, 244, 248,
 250, 277, 279
 San'ā, 171
 Sassanid, 217
 Saudi Arabia, 214

- scepticism, 11, 13, 192, 196, 273
 schemas, historiographic, 29, 53, 140, 187, 200,
 scholasticism, 85, 88, 92
 scripture(s), 115, 176, 193, 194, 197
 Second World War, 51, 53, 203
 sects, Muslim, 185, 198, 208
 Seleucids, 57, 273
 semantic objectivity, 196
 semiotics, legal, 87
 Serapis, 275, 276
 Serb, Serbian, 218, 245, 270
 Severans, 276
 Shaddai, 272
 shadow of God on earth, the, 246, 267
sharī`a, shar'ist, 49, 55, 70, 78, 79, 89, 91, 125, 126, 190, 193, 200, 217, 218, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 252, 253, 284, 285
 Shi'ite, 189, 218, 221, 222, 228, 250, 253, 284
 Shi'ite imamate, 226
Shūrā, 250
 Siffīn, 151
 signs, Signs, 30, 69, 72, 74, 82, 140, 141, 142, 144, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 156, 158
siyāsa, *siyāsa`aqliyya*, *siyāsa shar`iyya*, 210, 236, 246, 286
 Slavic polities, 271
 social contract, 28, 68
 social order, 27, 68, 189, 209
 social-Darwinism, 7, 9, 20, 24, 45, 204
 Sol Invictus, 272, 275
sola sancta scriptura, 194
 source-criticism, 4
 sovereign(s), 58, 214, 223, 226, 244, 267, 273
 sovereignty, royal, 16, 45, 68, 267, 282, 284
 Spain, 114, 241, 250
 spirit, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 20, 21, 44, 47, 48, 54, 56, 87, 88, 166, 225, 229, 231, 263
 state, conception of, 215
 state, the, xi, 20, 41, 46, 53, 54, 58, 59, 60, 121, 126, 140, 152, 158, 189, 190, 191, 192, 195, 197, 200, 208, 209, 210, 212, 214, 215, 216, 217, 219, 220, 222, 223, 224, 230, 231, 233, 238, 241, 243, 244, 253, 263, 264, 275, 279, 280
 stateless praxis, 215
 statements, performative, 110
 Stoicism, 59
 subject, 3, 10, 12, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 79, 85, 229, 231, 244, 269, 279
 subject, historical, 9, 17, 18, 22, 25
 substance, x, xi, xviii, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 22, 32, 70, 74, 75, 88, 236
 Sufi, Sufis, 145, 150, 165, 168, 252
 al-Sufyānī, 150
 Sultanism, 214, 285, 286
 Sunnis, Sunnism, 70, 108, 145, 150, 189, 220, 221, 231, 250, 251
sūras, 106
 survival, 48, 191
 syllogism, syllogistic, 52-53, 84-86, 97
 sympathy, 11, 12
 synchronicity, 15
syneidesis, 236
 Synod of Constantinople, 278
 Syria, 101, 105, 126, 150, 171, 214, 217, 284
 Syrian civilization, 57
ta'wīl, 81
 Tablet, the, 149, 177
tafsīr (exegesis), 81
 Taghlib, 212
Tahrif, 73, 115, 155
 Talibanism, 241
 Talmud, 109, 114, 262, 265
tamthīl, 84
Tanzīl, 105
tawhīd, 30, 71, 252
taxiarchia, 226, 279
 taxonomic, 12, 89
 teleology, 15, 23, 142

- telescoping, 44, 45, 60, 103, 139, 212, 214, 247
 temporal series, temporality, x, 4, 5, 9, 23, 30, 69, 70, 72, 75, 77, 139, 141, 142
 textual transmission, 196
 textualist pietism, 145
 The End, 149, 150, 151, 153, 156
 The Gate of Alexander, 156
 Theocracy, 217, 279
 theodicy, xiii, 31, 72, 73, 74, 75, 81, 116, 120, 125, 232, 236
 theologocentrism, 207
 theology, xi, xiii, 23, 105, 112, 123, 145, 152, 167, 228, 233, 235, 243, 252, 253, 271, 277, 279, 284
 theology, apophatic, 235
 theology, political, 187, 210, 225
 theology, subordanonist, 276, 281
 theory of the Caliphate, Sunni, 224
theos hypsistos, 272
 Thousand and One Nights, 171
 Throne, God's, 149, 177, 178
 Tibet, 281
 time of myth, 4, 15, 28, 69, 72, 76,
 time, dissipative, 153, 157
 Torah, 31, 73, 109, 114, 155, 177
 Tosefists, 262
 tradition, traditions, traditionalism, x, xii, xvi, 29, 31, 33, 45, 56, 60, 61, 67, 68, 70, 72, 74, 83, 85, 87, 89, 95, 101, 102, 104, 105, 107, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 117, 121, 124, 126, 127, 128, 130, 141, 142, 143, 144, 147, 148, 149, 150, 156, 161, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 171, 174, 175, 176, 188, 189, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 199, 203, 205, 210, 211, 213, 214, 215, 217, 220, 224, 229, 232, 236, 238, 241, 246, 248, 249, 250, 252, 253, 255, 256, 258, 276, 281, 284
 tradition, Islamic, 68, 70, 165, 246
translatio imperii, 41, 276
 trans-substantiality, 267
 Trinity, 278
 tropological analysis, 4
 Turks, 152, 280
 type(s), 27, 29, 32, 48, 49, 57, 68, 74, 75, 115, 116, 117, 279
 typology, typological, xiii, xv, 10, 12, 15, 26, 25, 27, 31, 32, 33, 44, 51, 54, 56, 57, 58, 73, 74, 94, 102, 115, 117, 116, 118, 122, 128, 139, 140, 142, 147, 150, 154, 155, 201, 203, 209, 226, 262, 277, 278, 279, 283, 284
typus Christi, 32, 51, 73
 tyranny, 226, 229

 'ulamā, 86, 91, 92, 112, 113, 115, 116, 118, 124, 158
 Umayyad mosque (The Great Mosque of Damascus), 153
 Umayyads, the, 43, 53, 151, 189, 212, 217, 230, 247, 281
umma, 231
 universalism, imperialist, 209
al-'Urwa al-wuthqā, 19
 utopia, 7, 127, 168, 172

 value(s), 6, 10, 17, 20, 22, 25, 43, 44, 48, 59, 69, 70, 120, 152, 156, 197, 216, 222, 271
vaticinium ex eventu, 148, 149, 250
 Vedas, 109
 Venus, 59
Verstehen, 11, 24
 vicar, 247, 284
 vice regent, 284
 vitalism, vitalist, 5, 9, 17, 20, 44, 49, 53, 57, 202
 Vizirate, the, 246
Volksgeist, 8, 9, 11, 21
vox dei, 270
vox populi, 270

 Wahhabism, 121, 241
wahī, 128
Weltanschauung,
 Weltanschauungslehre, 10, 43, 202
 West, Western, ix, x, xi, xii, xvi, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, 18, 20, 23, 30, 41, 44,

- 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57,
 60, 61, 72, 102, 103, 104, 130,
 139, 154, 156, 164, 167, 170, 180,
 187, 190, 191, 193, 202, 203, 204,
 207, 219, 224, 231, 234, 249, 270,
 276, 277, 279, 280, 281
 Woden, 271, 272
 writing, historical, xv, xvi, 4, 5, 12,
 16, 18, 27, 29, 30, 37, 43, 54, 74,
 76, 146, 148, 207, 208, 213
- xenophilia, 39, 204
 xenophobia, 39, 204
 Xenophon, 273
xwarra, 272
yaqīn, 83
 Zaydis, 189, 231, 242
 Zeus, 30, 272
 Zirids, 56
 Zoroastrians, 31, 72

Index of Proper Names

- Aaron, 228
 al-‘Abbās, 154
 ‘Abduh, Muhammad, 19, 20, 121,
 122, 123, 124, 125, 127, 271
 Abraham Ibn Ezra, 114
 Abū Dāwūd, 143
 Abū Nuwās, 174
 Abū Ya`lā ibn al-Farrā`, 221, 252
 Abū Yūsuf, 243
 Abū Zaid, N. H., 128, 129
 Abu’l-Barakāt al-Baghdādi, 111
 Aethelwulf, 271, 272
 Afghānī, Jamāl al-Dīn al-, 19, 20, 21,
 22, 23, 24, 253, 271
 Ahmad b. Hanbal, 143, 234
 ‘Ā’isha, 175
 Alaric, 218
 Alexander, 28, 56, 57, 58, 154, 274,
 276
 ‘Ali, 168
 Apollodorus of Damascus, 59
 Arbogast, 218
 Aristotle, 59, 84, 87, 236, 268, 273
 Assmann, Jan, 102
 al-Aswad al-‘Ansī, 152
 Auerbach, Erich, 73
 Augustine, St., 9, 15, 32, 121, 140,
 141, 142, 149, 158, 225, 227, 272,
 277, 279
 Augustus, 59, 274, 279
 Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), 84, 145, 253
 al-Bājī, 91

 Barānī, 190
 al-Barzanjī, 143, 144, 145, 146, 149,
 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 157, 159
 Becker, Carl Heinrich, 56, 57
 Bergson, Henri, 74

 Black, Anthony, 186, 187, 188, 189,
 190, 191, 192, 201, 203, 207, 210,
 216, 217, 218, 224, 225, 228, 231,
 246, 250, 252, 253
 Bloch, Ernst, 34, 35
 Bossuet, 286
 Bourdieu, Pierre, 281
 Braudel, Fernand, 13, 49, 51
 Brown, Peter, 260
 al-Bukhārī, 108, 110, 111, 123, 143
 Burckhardt, Jacob, 5, 52, 54
 Burke, Edmund, 8

 Caetani, Leone, 57
 Cahen, Claude, 208
 Calvin, 193, 225
 Caracalla, 59
 Celsus, 275, 276
 Clastres, Pierre, 268
 Claudius, 59
 Clovis, 270, 278
 Collingwood, R. G., 9, 20
 Constantine, 115, 157, 272, 274, 275,
 276, 277, 279
 Crone, Patricia, 186, 187, 188, 189,
 190, 191, 192, 195, 206, 209, 210,
 214, 219, 221, 222, 223, 225, 226,
 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233,
 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 240, 241,
 242, 243, 245, 246, 247, 250,
 Cumont, Franz, 280
 Cyrus, 273, 276

 Dagron, Gilbert, 278
 Dante, 277
 David, King, 28, 68, 114, 177, 178,
 279
 de Bonald, Louis, 202

- de Sade, Marquis, 168, 174
 Dilthey, Wilhelm, 11
 Diocletian, 274, 275
 Diotogenes, 274
 Domitian, 274
 Dumézil, Georges, 45, 267
 Durkheim, Émile, 42, 268
- Ecphantus, 274
 Elagabalus, 105
 Eliade, Mircea, 102, 268
 Engels, Friedrich, 125
 Eusebius, 225, 272, 273, 275, 277, 278, 284
 Ezra (Ha-Sofer), 114
- al-Fadl b. Sahl, 246
 al-Fārābī, 185, 237, 253
 Feuerbach, Ludwig, 268
 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 8
 Foucault, Michel, 11, 13, 42
 Fourier, Charles, 168
 Fowden, Garth, 276
 Freud, Sigmund, 268
 Frye, Northrop, 85, 168
- Galen, 59
 Galerius, Emperor, 280
 Gennadius, 280
 Gernet, Jacques, 46
 al-Ghazālī, 117, 179, 190, 214, 233, 235, 236
 Gibb, Hamilton, 50, 55, 201, 245
 Girard, René, 268
 Gökalp, Ziya, 19
 Grabar, André, 278
 Gratian, 232
- Halbwachs, Maurice, 13
 Hamann, Johann Georg, 5, 11, 202
 Hegel, G. W. F., 3, 8, 22, 25, 39, 56, 75, 139, 202, 216
 Heidegger, Martin, 25
 Herder, Johann Gottfried, 5, 8, 9, 11, 20, 26, 52, 53, 55, 139, 202
 Hitler, Adolf, 45
 Hobsbawm, Eric, 35
- Hocart, A. M., 268
 Hodgson, Marshall, 55, 56
 Hourani, Albert, 201, 204, 205, 207, 222
 Hülegü, 286
 Hume, David, 271
 Huntington, Samuel, 11, 44, 45, 139
 Husayn, Tāhā, 122, 123, 127, 151
 al-Husayn, 151
 al-Husri, Sati', 19
 Hypatia, 253
- Iamblichus, 59, 274
 Ibn `Abbās, 164
 Ibn Abī Du'ād, 220, 222
 Ibn al-Jawzī, 233
 Ibn al-Muqaffa', 215, 216, 246
 Ibn al-Rīwandī, 169
 Ibn Bābawayh, 235
 Ibn Fadlān, 283
 Ibn Hajar, 143
 Ibn Hazm, 114, 252
 Ibn Kathīr, 143, 146,
 Ibn Khaldūn, 20, 26, 110, 185, 190, 215, 220, 236, 252, 253
 Ibn Māja, 143
 Ibn Mujaḥhid, 104, 106, 107, 108
 Ibn Muqla, 108
 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 165
 Ibn Rushd (Averroes), 117, 120, 236, 253
 Ibn Sīdah, 166
 Ibn Taymīya, 84
 Ibn Tmart, 241
 Ibn Zur'a, 275
 Ibrahim Ibn Dāwd, 114
- Jalāl Kishk, Muhammad, 166
 Jawharī, Tantāwī, 124
 Jesus, 31, 32, 72, 73, 115, 147, 153, 154, 155, 156, 172, 177, 271, 272
 John Chrisostom, 277
 John of Salisbury, 277
 Joseph, 172
 Julia Domna, 59
 Julian, Emperor, 275
 Julius Caesar, 274

- al-Jurjānī, Abd al-Qāhir, 97
 Justinian, 101, 273
 al-Juwainī, 235

 Kant, Immanuel, 5, 227
 Kemal, Namik, 19
 Khalaf Allāh, M. A., 128
 al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, 111
 al-Khūli, A., 128, 129
 al-Kindi, 145

 Lessing, Gottfried Ephraim, vii, 194
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 42, 45, 76, 90
 Lewis, Bernard, 44, 204, 209, 258
 Lombard, Maurice, 60
 Longinus, 59
 Lotman, Juri, 87
 Louis IX, 269
 Loyola, Ignatius, 168
 Luther, Martin, 122, 225

 al-Ma'mūn, 87, 147, 152, 212, 219, 246, 251
 Mann, Thomas, 6, 267
 Mannheim, Karl, 14
 Marrou, Henri-Irené, 50
 Mary, 31, 72
 Maslama b. Habib (Musaylima), 152
 al-Mas'ūdī, 31, 73
 Mauss, Marcel, 46, 60, 205
 al-Māwardī, 240, 242, 243, 244, 245, 248
 Mehmet the Conqueror, 157, 224
 Meister Eckhart, 6
 Miskawayh, 169
 Montgomery Watt, William, 186
 Moore, Barrington, 35
 Muhammad II, 166
 Muhammad, 18, 29, 30, 31, 52, 61, 70, 71, 72, 73, 78, 80, 101, 102, 104, 105, 109, 115, 122, 139, 141, 142, 146, 147, 149, 154, 155, 156, 172, 176, 177, 178, 189, 191, 197, 198, 200, 207, 210, 211, 212, 213, 217, 221, 226, 227, 228, 232, 247, 248, 250, 251, 252, 262, 283, 284, 285
 Muhammad b. Zakariyyā al-Rāzi, 253
 Mullah Omar, 283
 al-Mustadī' (Caliph), 233
 al-Mu'tasim (Caliph), 143, 152
 Müntzer, Thomas, 35
 Msa al-Kāzim, 152
 Musaylima (see Maslama), 152

 al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, Muhammad, 152
 Naipaul, V. S., 201
 Nasir ad-Dīn Tūsī, 190, 286
 Nizām al-Mulk, 190, 252
 Nöldeke, Theodor, 106
 Nu'aym b. Hammād, 142, 143, 144, 146, 148, 149

 Origen, 272, 277, 284
 Orosius, 277
 Otto, Rudolf, 268

 Parmenides, 74
 Peterson, Erik, 276
 Philip the Arab, 59
 Philo, 274
 Plato, 59, 236, 269, 273, 286
 Plotinus, 59
 Porphyry, 59
 Proclus, 59
 Prometheus, 30, 155
 Pseudo-Methodius, 147

 al-Qā'im (Caliph), 142, 250, 251
 al-Qādir (Caliph), 251
 al-Qurtubī, 143

 Ranke, Otto von, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 139, 202
 Rashīd Ridā, Muhammad, 121, 122, 123, 124, 127, 166
 al-Rāzī, Fakhr ad-Dīn, 110, 196
 Reimarus, Hermann Samuel, 124
 Renan, Ernest, 54, 55, 201, 202
 Ricimer, 218
 Rodinson, Maxime, 129
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 21
 Rudé, George, 35

- Sa'id b. Ya'qūb al-Fayyūmī (Saadya Gaon), 115
 Sabbatai Sevi, 145, 157
 Said, Edward, x, xi, 42, 204
 Saladin, 152, 283
 al-Samaw'al al-Maghribī, 114
 al-Sarakhsī, 253, 265
 Savarkar, V. D., 44
 Scalf, 271
 Schelling, Friedrich, 4, 5, 15, 24
 Schleirmacher, Friedrich, 11
 Schmitt, Carl, 216, 261
 Septimus Severus, 59
 al-Sharīf al Murtadā, 221
 al-Sharīf al-Radī, 221
 al-Shātībī, 91, 236
 Simmel, Georg, 45
 Solomon, King, 68, 87, 124, 157, 155, 172
 Spengler, Oswald, 9, 56, 57, 202, 203
 Spinoza, Benedikt, 114, 120
 St. Ambrose, 277
 St. Paul, 236
 St. Remy, 278
 Stenidas, 274
 Stilicho, 218
 Strauss, Leo, 237
 al-Subkī, 132
 Sulaymān (Caliph), 250
 al-Suyūtī, 167
 Syed Ahmad Khan, 19
 al-Tabarī, 146, 225
 Themistius, 274, 275
 Theodoric, 219
 Theodosius, 225, 273, 276
 Thomas à, Becket, 278
 Thompson, E. P., 35
 al-Tirmidhī, 180
 Toussaint l'Ouverture, 35
 Toynbee, Arnold, 56, 57, 139, 207
 Treitinger, Otto, 278
 Troeltsch, Ernst, 44, 202
 al-Turtshī, 214
 Ullmann, Walter, 216, 217
 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, 154
 Umar, 'Umar b. Al-Khattāb (Caliph), 52, 104, 151, 152, 168
 'Uthmān (Caliph), 151, 168
 Valentinian, 276
 Valla, Lorenzo, 270
 Varro, Terentius, 274, 277
 Voltaire, Franāois-Marie, 21, 53, 202
 von Humboldt, Wilhelm, 5, 201, 202
 al-Wansharīsī, 264
 al-Wāthiq (Caliph), 219
 Weber, Max, 42, 55, 222
 Wellhausen, Julius, 105, 235
 White, Hayden, xvii, 13, 153
 Williams, Raymond, 35
 Yahyā b. `Adī, 253
 Yahyā b. Zikrawayh, 152
 Yazid, 151
 al-Zamakhsharī, 113
 Zarathustra, Zoroaster, 28